

OEDIPUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

BY DRYDEN AND LEE.

ADAPTED FOR
THEATRICAL REPRESENTATION,

AS PERFORMED
AT THE THEATRE-ROYAL, DRURY-LANE.

REGULATED FROM THE PROMPT-BOOKS,
By Permission of the Managers.

"The Lines distinguished by inverted Commas, are omitted in the Representation."

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M DCC XCI.



THE
PREFACE.

THOUGH it be dangerous to raise too great an expectation, especially in works of this nature, where we are to please an unsatiable audience; yet 'tis reasonable to prepossess them in favour of an author, and therefore both the Prologue and Epilogue informed you that *Œdipus* was the most celebrated piece of all antiquity: that *Sophocles*, not only the greatest wit, but one of the greatest men in Athens, made it for the stage at the public cost, and that it had the reputation of being his masterpiece, not only amongst the seven of his which are still remaining, but of the greater number which are perished. *Aristotle* has more than once admired it in his book of poetry; *Horace* has mentioned it; *Lucullus*, *Julius Cæsar*, and other noble Romans, have written on the same subject, though their poems are wholly lost; but *Seneca's* is still preserved. In our own age, *Corneille* has attempted it, and it appears by his preface, with great success: but a judicious reader will easily observe how much the copy is inferior to the original. He tells you himself, that he owes a great part of his success to the happy episode of *Theseus* and *Dirce*; which is the same thing as if we should acknowledge, that we were indebted for our good fortune to the underplot of *Adrastus*, *Eurydice*, and *Creon*. The truth is, he miserably failed in the character of his hero. If he desired that *Œdipus* should be pitied, he should have made him a better man. He forgot that *Sophocles* had taken care to shew him in his first entrance, a just, a merciful, a successful, a religious prince: and, in short, a father of his country: instead of these, he has drawn him suspicious, designing, more anxious of keeping the Theban crown, than solicitous for the safety of his people; hectoring by *Theseus*, contemned by *Dirce*, and scarce maintaining a second part in his own tragedy. This was an error in the first concoction: and therefore never to be mended in the second or third. He introduced a greater hero than *Œdipus* himself; for when *Theseus* was once there, that companion of *Hercules* must yield to none. The poet was obliged to furnish him with business, to make him an equipage suitable to his dignity, and, by following him too close, to lose his other King of *Brentford* in the crowd. *Seneca*, on the other side, as if there were no such thing as nature to be minded in a play, is always running after pompous expression, pointed sentences, and philosophical notions, more proper for the study than the stage. The Frenchman followed a wrong scent, and the Roman was ab-

solutely at cold hunting. All we could gather out of Corneille was, that an episode must be, but not his way; and Seneca supplied us with no new hint, but only a relation which he makes of his Tiresias raising the ghost of Laius: which is here performed in view of the audience; the rites and ceremonies so far his, as he agreed with antiquity, and the religion of the Greeks: but he himself was beholden to Homer's Tiresias in the *Odyssees* for some of them, and the rest have been collected from Heliodore's *Æthiopiques*, and Lucan's *Erietho*. Sophocles, indeed, is admirable every where; and therefore we have followed him as close as possibly we could. But the Athenian theatre (whether more perfect than ours, is not now disputed) had a perfection different from ours. You see there in every act a single scene, (or two at most) which manage the business of the play, and after that succeeds the chorus, which commonly takes up more time in singing, than there has been employed in speaking. The principal person appears almost constantly through the play; but the inferior parts seldom above once in the whole tragedy. The conduct of our stage is much more difficult, where we are obliged never to lose any considerable character which we have once presented. Custom likewise has obtained, that we must form an under-plot of second persons, which must be depending on the first, and their bye-walks must be like those in a labyrinth, which all of them lead into the great parterre; or like so many several lodging chambers, which have their outlets into the same gallery. Perhaps, after all, if we could think so, the ancient method, as it is the easiest, is also the most natural, and the best. For variety, as it is managed, is too often subject to breed distraction; and while we would please too many ways, for want of art in the conduct, we please in none. But we have given you more already than was necessary for a preface, and, for aught we know, may gain no more by our instructions, than that politic nation is like to do, who have taught their enemies to fight so long, that at last they are in a condition to invade them.

OEDIPUS.

THERE is a proverb, which says, that two heads are better than one—In designing, perhaps, it may be so; in executing, such a co-operation seems to forbid the proper assimilation of parts.

This Play is written by DRYDEN and LEE, and their several parts of the production are known. To DRYDEN we owe the entire first and third acts, with the plan and arrangement of the whole; LEE furnished out the remainder.

The Fable, if it can ever please, will please from its being ancient—Sophocles presented this subject to the audiences of ancient Greece, and its interest must there have been powerful—But to a modern the whole play is founded upon an ideal criminality—for we consider the heart as indispensably necessary to constitute either crime or merit; and no more affix the imputation of guilt to unconscious offence, than we do of virtue to unintended good.

In the play of OEDIPUS, we behold a man involved by a fatality which he has no power to shun, murdering his father, and incestuously embracing his mother; whom conviction plunges in despair, whom feeling hurries into phrenzy.—The other incidents are arrayed with suitable barbarity; they are such as the mind loaths to imagine, and the sensibilities of man shrink from beholding.

With the incurable defects therefore of historic truth to treat, and circumstances too well known to be any way softened, this composition will be found, from its sentiments and language, among the best productions of these authors.

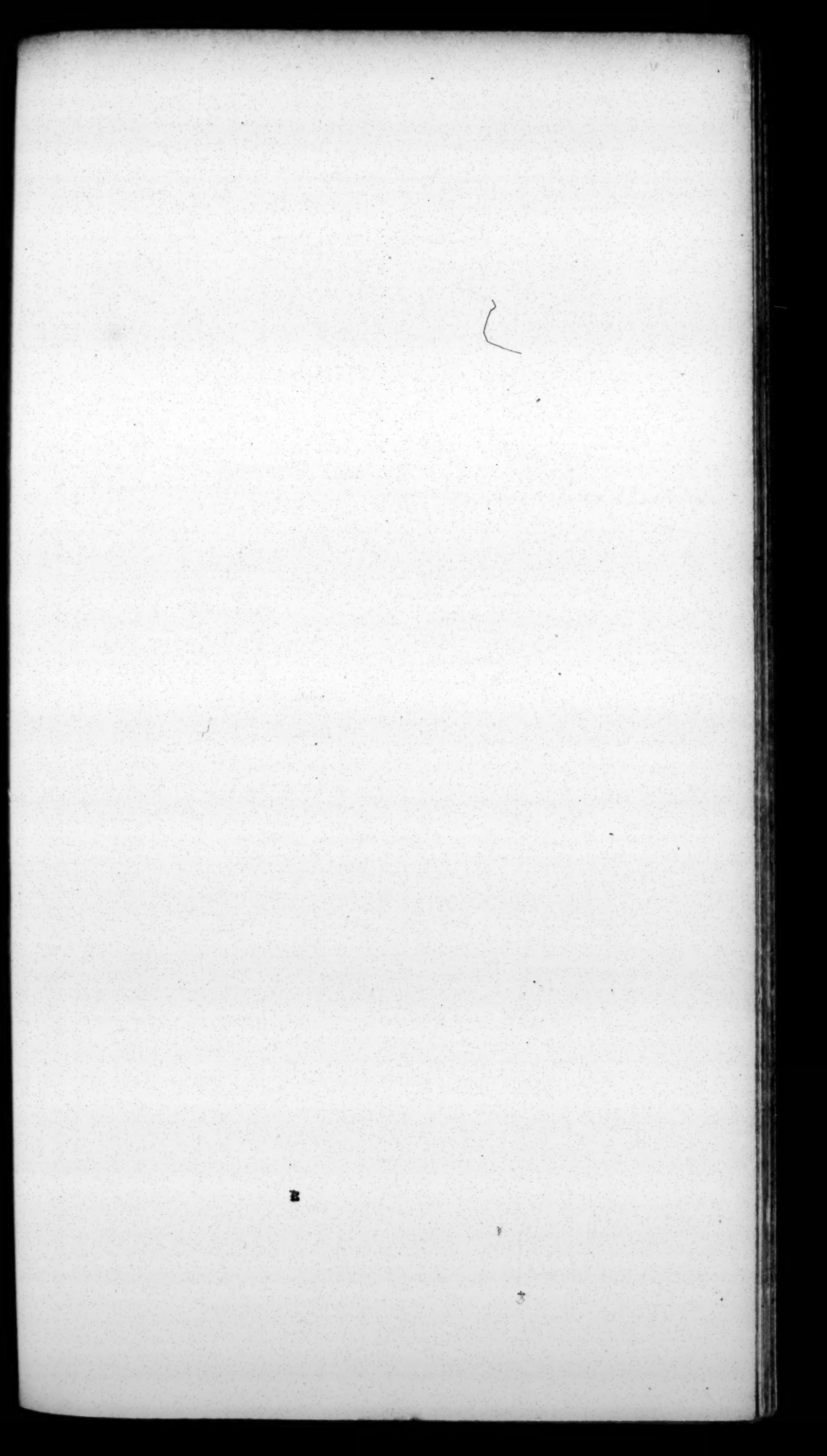
It but seldom makes its appearance upon the modern stage, and is hasting, with all its *mythological* brethren, to that repose, which only solitary curiosity disturbs in the silent though elastic ground of the library.—

Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram,
Perque domos ditis vacuas et inania regna.

PROLOGUE.

*WHEN Athens all the Grecian states did guide,
And Greece gave laws to all the world beside,
Then Sophocles and Socrates did sit,
Supreme in wisdom one, and one in wit :
And wit from wisdom differ'd not in those,
But as 'twas sung in verse, or said in prose.
Then OEdipus, on crowded theatres,
Drew all admiring eyes, and list'ning ears :
The pleas'd spectator shouted every line,
The noblest, manliest, and the best design !
And every critic of each learned age,
By this just model has reform'd the stage.
Now, should it fail, (as Heav'n avert our fear !)
Damn it in silence, lest the world should hear.
For were it known this poem did not please,
You might set up for perfect savages :
Your neighbours would not look on you as men ;
But think the nation all turn'd Picts again.
Faith, as you manage matters, 'tis not fit,
You should suspect yourselves of too much wit.
Drive not the jest too far, but spare this piece :
And, for this once, be not more wise than Greece.
See twice ; do not pell-mell to damning fall,
Like true-born Britons, who ne'er think at all.
Pray be advis'd ; and though at Mons you won,
On pointed cannon do not always run.
With some respect to ancient wits proceed :
You take the four first councils for your creed,*

*But when you lay tradition wholly by,
And on the private spirit alone rely,
You turn fanatics in your poetry.
If, notwithstanding all that we can say,
You needs will have your penn'worths of the play,
And come resolv'd to damn, because you pay,
Record it, in memorial of the fact,
The first play bury'd since the woollen act.*



Dramatis Personæ.

Men.

OEDIPUS,
ADRASTUS,
CREON,
TIRESIAS,
HÆMON,
ALCANDER,

DIOCLES,
PYRACMON,
PHORBAS,
DYMAS,
ÆGEON,
Ghost of LAIUS.

Women.

JOCASTA,
EURYDICE.
MANTO.

Priests, Citizens, Attendants, &c.

SCENE, Thebes.



OEDIPUS.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Curtain rises to a plaintive tune, representing the miseries of Thebes; dead Bodies appear at a distance in the Streets; some faintly go over the Stage, others drop. Enter ALCANDER, DIOCLES, and PYRACMON.

Alcander.

METHINKS we stand on ruins; nature shakes
About us, and the universal frame
So loose, that it wants but another push
To leap from off its hinges.

Dioc. "No sun to cheer us; but a bloody globe
"That rolls above; a bald and beamless fire;
"His face o'er-grown with scurf." The sun's sick too;
Shortly he'll be an earth.

Pyr. Therefore the seasons
Lie all confus'd; and, by the Heav'ns neglected, 10
Forget themselves. "Blind winter meets the summer
"In his mid-way, and, seeing not his livery,
"Has driven him head-long back: and the raw damps
"With flaggy winds fly heavily about,
"Scattering their pestilential colds and rheums
"Through all the lazy air."

Alc. Hence murrains follow'd
On bleating flocks, and on the lowing herds :
At last, the malady
Grew more domestic, and the faithful dog
Dy'd at his master's feet.

20

Dioc. And next his master :

“ For all those plagues which earth and air had brooded,
“ First on inferior creatures try'd their force ;
“ And last they seiz'd on man.”

Pyr. “ And then a thousand deaths at once advanc'd,
“ And every dart took place. All was so sudden,
“ That scarce a first man fell—One but began
“ To wonder, and straight fell a wonder too ;
“ A third, who stoop'd to raise his dying friend,
“ Dropp'd in the pious act.”—Heard you that groan ?

30

[*Groan within.*]

Dioc. A troop of ghosts took flight together there :
“ Now death's grown riotous, and will play no more
“ For single stakes ; but families and tribes.”
How are we sure we breathe not now our last,
And that, next minute,
Our bodies, cast into some common pit,
Shall not be built upon, and overlaid
By half a people ?

Alc. There's a chain of causes
Link'd to effects ; invincible necessity,
That whate'er is, could not but so have been ;
That's my security.

40

Enter CREON.

Cre. So had it need, when all our streets lie cover'd
With dead and dying men ;
And earth exposes bodies on the pavements

More than she hides in graves.
Betwixt the bride and bridegroom have I seen
The nuptial torch do common offices
Of marriage and of death.

50

Dioc. Now Œdipus

(If he returns from war, our other plague)
Will scarce find half he left, to grace his triumphs.

Pyr. A feeble Pæan will be sung before him.

Alc. He would do well to bring the wives and children
Of conquer'd Argians, to renew his Thebes.

Cre. May funerals meet him at the city gates,
With their detested omen.

Dioc. Of his children,

Cre. Nay, though she be my sister, of his wife.

60

Alc. Oh, that our Thebes might once again behold
A monarch Theban born !

Dioc. We might have had one.

Pyr. Yes, had the people pleas'd.

Cre. Come, you're my friends——

The queen, my sister, after Laius' death,
Fear'd to lie single, and supply'd his place
With a young successor.

Dioc. He much resembles
Her former husband too.

70

Alc. I always thought so.

Pyr. When twenty winters more have grizzl'd his black
locks,

He will be very Laius.

Cre. So he will :

Mean time she stands provided of a Laius
More young and vigorous too, by twenty springs.
These women are such cunning purveyors !
Mark, where their appetites have once been pleas'd,

The same resemblance in a younger lover
Lies brooding in their fancies the same pleasures,
And urges their remembrance to desire.

80

Dioc. Had merit, not her dotage, been consider'd,
Then Creon had been king : but Œdipus !
A stranger !——

Cre. That word, stranger, I confess,
Sounds harshly in my ears.

Dioc. We are your creatures,
The people prone, as in all general ills,
To sudden change ; the king in wars abroad ;
The queen a woman weak and unregarded ;
Eurydice, the daughter of dead Laius,
A princess young, andauteous, and unmarried.
Methinks, from these disjointed propositions
Something might be produc'd.

90

Cre. The gods have done
Their part, by sending this commodious plague.
But, oh, the princess ! her hard heart is shut,
By adamantine locks, against my love.

Alc. Your claim to her is strong ; you are betroth'd.

Pyr. True, in her nonage.

100

“ *Alc.* But that let's remov'd.”

Dioc. I heard the prince of Argos, young Adrastus,
When he was hostage here——

Cre. Oh, name him not ! the bane of all my hopes ;
That hot-brain'd, headlong warrior, has the charms
Of youth, and somewhat of a lucky rashness,
To please a woman yet more fool than he.
That thoughtless sex is caught by outward form,
And empty noise, and loves itself in man.

Alc. But since the war broke out about our frontiers, 110
He's now a foe to Thebes.

Cre. But is not so to her. See, she appears ;
Once more I'll prove my fortune : you insinuate
Kind thoughts of me into the multitude ;
Lay load upon the court ; gull them with freedom ;
And you shall see them toss their tails, and gad,
As if the breeze had stung them.

Dioc. We'll about it. [Exeunt Alc. Dioc. and Pyr.

Enter EURYDICE.

Cre. Hail, royal maid ; thou bright Eurydice !
A lavish planet reign'd when thou wert born ; 120
And made thee of such kindred-mould to Heav'n,
Thou seem'st more Heav'n's than ours.

Eur. Cast round your eyes ;
Where late the streets were so thick sown with men,
Like Cadmus brood, they jostled for the passage :
Now look for those erected heads, and see them
Like pebbles paving all our public ways :
When you have thought on this, then answer me,
If these be hours of courtship !

Cre. Yes, they are ; 130
For when the gods destroy so fast, 'tis time
We should renew the race.

Eur. What, in the midst of horror ?

Cre. Why not then ?
There's the more need of comfort.

Eur. Impious Creon !

Cre. Unjust Eurydice ! can you accuse me
Of love, which is Heaven's precept, and not fear
That vengeance which you say pursues our crimes,
Should reach your perjuries ? 140

Eur. Still th' old argument.
I bade you cast your eyes on other men,
Now cast them on yourself : think what you are.

Cre. A man.

Eur. A man !

Cre. Why doubt you ? I'm a man.

Eur. 'Tis well you tell me so, I should mistake you
For any other part o' th' whole creation,
Rather than think you man. Hence from my sight,
Thou poison to my eyes: 150

Cre. 'Twas you first poison'd mine; and yet, methinks,
My face and person should not make you sport.

Eur. You force me, by your importunities,
To shew you what you are.

Cre. A prince, who loves you :
And, since your pride provokes me, worth your love,
Ev'n at its highest value.

Eur. Love from thee !
Why love renounc'd thee ere thou saw'st the light :
Nature herself started back when thou wert born ; 160
And cry'd, the work's not mine——
The midwife stood aghast ; and when she saw
Thy mountain back, and thy distorted legs,
Thy face itself,
Half-minted with the royal stamp of man,
And half o'ercome with beast, stood doubting long,
Whose right in thee were more ;
And knew not, if to burn thee in the flames,
Were not the holier work.

Cre. Am I to blame, if nature threw my body 170
In so perverse a mould ? Yet when she cast
Her envious hand upon my supple joints,
Unable to resist, and rumples them
On heaps in their dark lodging, to revenge
Her bungled work, she stamps my mind more fair ;
And as from chaos, huddled and deform'd,

The god struck fire, and lighted up the lamps
That beautify the sky, so he inform'd
This ill-shap'd body with a daring soul ;
And making less than man, he made me more.

180

Eur. No ; thou art all one error, soul and body,
The first young trial of some unskill'd pow'r ;
Rude in the making art, and ape of Jove.
Thy crooked mind within hunch'd out thy back ;
And wander'd in thy limbs : to thy own kind
Make love, if thou canst find it in the world ;
And seek not from our sex to raise an offspring,
Which, mingled with the rest, would tempt the gods
To cut off human kind.

Cre. No ; let them leave
The Argian prince for you ; that enemy
Of Thebes has made you false, and break the vows
You made to me.

190

Eur. They were my mother's vows,
Made in my nonage.

Cre. But hear me, maid ;
This blot of nature, this deform'd, loath'd Creon,
Is master of a sword, to reach the blood
Of your young minion, spoil the gods' fine work,
And stab you in his heart.

200

Eur. This when thou dost,
Then may'st thou still be curs'd with loving me ;
And, as thou art, be still unpitied, loath'd ;
And let his ghost—No, let his ghost have rest :
But let the greatest, fiercest, foulest fury,
Let Creon haunt himself.

[*Exit Eur.*

Cre. 'Tis true, I am
What she has told me, an offence to sight :
My body opens inward to my soul,

And lets in day to make my vices seen
 By all discerning eyes, but the blind vulgar.
 I must make haste ere Œdipus return,
 To snatch the crown and her; for I still love;
 But love with malice; as an angry cur
 Snarls while he feeds, so will I seize and stanch
 The hunger of my love on this proud beauty,
 And leave the scraps for slaves.

210

Enter TIRESIAS, leaning on a staff, and led by his daughter
 MANTO.

What makes this blind prophetic fool abroad!
 Would his Apollo had him; he's too holy
 For earth and me; I'll shun his walk, and seek
 My popular friends. 220

[Exit Creon.]

Tir. A little farther; yet a little farther,
 Thou wretched daughter of a dark old man,
 Conduct my weary steps: and thou, who seest
 For me and for thyself, beware thou tread not
 With impious steps upon dead corpses;—now stay:
 Methinks I draw more open, vital air.
 Where are we?

Man. Under covert of a wall:
 The most frequented once, and noisy part
 Of Thebes, now midnight silence reigns ev'n here;
 And grass untrodden springs beneath our feet.

230

Tir. If there be nigh this place a sunny bank,
 There let me rest awhile: a sunny bank!
 Alas, how can it be, where no sun shines!
 But a dim winking taper in the skies,
 That nods, and scarce holds up his drowsy head
 To glimmer through the damps!

*[A noise within. Follow, follow, follow! A Creon, a
 Creon, a Creon!]*

Hark! a tumultuous noise, and Creon's name
Thrice echo'd.

240

Man. Fly! the tempest drives this way.

Tir. Whither can age and blindness take their flight?
If I could fly, what could I suffer worse,
Secure of greater ills! [*Noise again*; Creon, Creon, Creon!

Enter CREON, DIOCLES, ALCANDER, PYRACMON, *followed*
by the crowd.

Cre. I thank ye, countrymen; but must refuse
The honours you intend me; they're too great;
And I am too unworthy; think again,
And make a better choice.

1st Cit. Think twice! I ne'er thought twice in all my life:
that's double work.

251

2d Cit. My first word is always my second; and therefore
I'll have no second word; and therefore once again, I say,
a Creon.

All. A Creon, a Creon, a Creon!

Cre. Yet hear me, fellow-citizens.

Dioc. Fellow-citizens! there was a word of kindness.

Alc. When did Ædipus salute you by that familiar name?

1st Cit. Never, never; he was too proud.

Cre. Indeed he could not, for he was a stranger: 260

But under him our Thebes is half destroy'd.

Forbid it, Heav'n, the residue should perish

Under a Theban born.

'Tis true, the gods might send this plague among you,

Because a stranger rul'd: but what of that,

Can I redress it now?

3d Cit. Yes, you or none:

'Tis certain that the gods are angry with us,

Because he reigns.

Cre. Ædipus may return; you may be ruin'd. 270

1st Cit. Nay, if that be the matter, we are ruin'd already.

2d Cit. Half of us that are here present, were living men but yesterday, and we that are absent do but drop and drop, and no man knows whether he be dead or living. And therefore, while we are sound and well, let us satisfy our consciences, and make a new king.

3d Cit. Ha, if we were but worthy to see another coronation, and then, if we must die, we'll go merrily together.

All. To the question, to the question.

Dioc. Are you content, Creon should be your king? 280

All. A Creon, a Creon, a Creon!

Tir. Hear me, ye Thebans, and thou, Creon, hear me.

1st Cit. Who's that would be heard? We'll hear no man: we can scarce hear one another.

Tir. I charge you, by the gods, to hear me.

2d Cit. Oh, 'tis Apollo's priest, we must hear him; 'tis the old blind prophet that sees all things.

3d Cit. He comes from the gods too, and they are our betters; and in good manners we must hear him. Speak, prophet. 290

2d Cit. For coming from the gods that's no great matter, they can all say that; but he's a great scholar; he can make almanacks, an he were put to't, and therefore, I say, hear him.

Tir. When angry Heav'n scatters its plagues among you,
Is it for nought, ye Thebans? Are the gods
Unjust for punishing? Are there no crimes
Which pull this vengeance down?

1st Cit. Yes, yes, no doubt there are some sins stirring,
that are the cause of all. 300

3d Cit. Yes, there are sins; or we should have no taxes.

2d Cit. For my part, I can speak it with a safe conscience,
I ne'er sinned in all my life.

1st Cit. Nor I.

3d Cit. Nor I.

2d Cit. Then we are all justified, the sin lies not at our doors.

Tir. All justified alike, and yet all guilty;
Were every man's false dealing brought to light,
His envy, malice, lying, perjuries, 310
His weights and measures, th' other man's extortions,
With what face could you tell offended Heav'n,
You had not sinn'd?

2d Cit. Nay, if these be sins, the case is alter'd: for my part, I never thought any thing but murder had been a sin.

Tir. And yet, as if all these were less than nothing,
You add rebellion to them, impious Thebans!
Have you not sworn before the gods to serve
And to obey this Œdipus, your king
By public voice elected? Answer me, 320
If this be true!

2d Cit. This is true; but it's a hard world, neighbours,
If a man's oath must be his master.

Cre. Speak, Diocles; all goes wrong.

Dioc. How are you traitors, countrymen of Thebes?
This holy sire, who presses you with oaths,
Forgets your first; were you not sworn before
To Laius and his blood?

All. We were: we were.

Dioc. While Laius has a lawful successor, 330
Your first oath still must bind: Eurydice
Is heir to Laius; let her marry Creon:
Offended Heav'n will never be appeas'd
While Œdipus pollutes the throne of Laius,
A stranger to his blood.

All. We'll no Œdipus, no Œdipus.

1st Cit. He puts the prophet in a mouse-hole.

2d Cit. I knew it would be so, the last man ever speaks
the best reason. 340

Tir. Can benefits thus die, ungrateful Thebans!
Remember yet, when after Laius' death,
The monster Sphinx laid your rich country waste,
Your vineyards spoil'd, your labouring oxen slew;
Yourselves for fear mew'd up within your walls,
She, taller than your gates, o'erlook'd your town;
But when she rais'd her bulk to sail above you,
She drove the air around her like a whirlwind,
And shaded all beneath; till stooping down,
She clapp'd her leathern wings against your tow'rs,
And thrust out her long neck, ev'n to your doors. 350

Dioc. Alc. Pyr. We'll hear no more.

Tir. You durst not meet in temples
T' invoke the gods for aid, the proudest he
Who leads you now, then cower'd, like a dar'd lark:
This Creon shook for fear,
The blood of Laius curdled in his veins;
'Till Œdipus arriv'd.
Call'd by his own high courage and the gods,
Himself to you a god: ye offer'd him
Your queen and crown; (but what was then your crown?)
And Heav'n authoriz'd it by his success. 361
Speak then, who is your lawful king?

All. 'Tis Œdipus.

Tir. 'Tis Œdipus indeed: your king more lawful
Than yet you dream; for something still there lies
In Heav'n's dark volume, which I read through mists:
'Tis great, prodigious; 'tis a dreadful birth,
Of wondrous fate; and now, just now disclosing.
I see, I see, how terrible it dawns:
And my soul sickens with it. 370

3d Cit. How the god shakes him !

Tir. He comes, he comes ! Victory ! Conquest ! Triumph !
But, oh, guiltless and guilty ! Murder ! Parricide !
Incest ! Discovery ! Punishment !——'tis ended,
And all your sufferings o'er.

A Trumpet within. Enter HÆMON.

Hæm. Rouse up, ye Thebans ; tune your Io Pæans !
Your king returns ; the Argians are o'ercome ;
Their warlike prince in single combat taken,
And led in bands by godlike Œdipus.

All. Œdipus, Œdipus, Œdipus !

380

Cre. Furies confound his fortune !

[*Aside.*

Haste, all haste,

[*To them.*

And meet with blessings our victorious king ;
Decree processions ; bid new holy-days,
Crown all the statues of our gods with garlands ;
And raise a brazen column, thus inscrib'd :
To Œdipus, now twice a conqueror : deliv'rer of his Thebes.
Trust me, I weep for joy to see this day.

Tir. Yes, Heav'n knows how thou weep'st :—Go, country-
men,

And, as you use to supplicate your gods——

390

So meet your king with bays and olive-branches :
Bow down, and touch his knees, and beg from him
An end of all your woes ; for only he
Can give it.

[*Exit Tiresias, the people following.*

*Enter ŒDIPUS in triumph ; ADRASTUS prisoner ; DYMAS,
and Train.*

Cre. All hail, great Œdipus !

Thou mighty conqueror, hail ! welcome to Thebes ;
To thy own Thebes ; to all that's left of Thebes :

For half thy citizens are swept away,
 And wanting of thy triumphs ;
 And we, the happy remnant, only live
 To welcome thee, and die.

400

OEdip. Thus pleasure never comes sincere to man :
 But lent by Heav'n upon hard usury ;
 And, while Jove holds us out the bowl of joy,
 Ere it can reach our lips, it's dash'd with gall
 By some left-handed god. Oh, mournful triumph !
 Oh, conquest gain'd abroad, and lost at home !
 Oh, Argos ! now rejoice, for Thebes lies low ;
 Thy slaughter'd sons now smile, and think they won ;
 When they can count more Theban ghosts than theirs. 410

Adr. No ; Argos mourns with Thebes ; you temper'd so
 Your courage, while you fought, that mercy seem'd
 The manlier virtue, and much more prevail'd.
 While Argos is a people, think your Thebes
 Can never want for subjects. Every nation
 Will crowd to serve where *Ædipus* commands.

Cre. [*To Hæm.*] How mean it shows to fawn upon the
 victor !

Hæm. Had you beheld him fight, you had said otherwise :
 Come, 'tis brave bearing in him, not to envy
 Superior virtue. 420

OEdip. This indeed is conquest,
 To gain a friend like you : why were we foes ?

Adr. 'Cause we were kings, and each disdain'd an equal.
 I fought to have it in my pow'r to do
 What thou hast done ; and so to use my conquest.
 To shew thee, honour was my only motive,
 Know this, that were my army at thy gates,
 And Thebes thus waste, I would not take the gift,
 Which, like a toy dropt from the hands of fortune,
 Lay for the next chance-comer. 430

OEdip. [*Embracing.*] No more captive,
But brother of the war : 'tis much more pleasant,
And safer, trust me, thus to meet thy love,
That when hard gantlets clench'd our warlike hands,
And keep them from soft use.

Adr. My conqueror !

OEdip. My friend ! that other name keeps enmity alive.
But longer to detain thee were a crime :
To love, and to Eurydice, go free :
Such welcome as a ruined town can give, 440
Expect from me ; the rest let her supply.

Adr. I go without a blush, though conquer'd twice,
By you, and by my princess. [*Exit Adrastus.*]

Cre. [*Aside.*] Then I am conquer'd thrice ; by *Ædipus*,
And her, and ev'n by him, the slave of both :
Gods, I'm beholden to you, for making me your image,
Would I could make you mine !

*Enter the People with branches in their hands, holding them up,
and kneeling ; two Priests before them.*

Alas, my people !

What means this speechless sorrow, down cast eyes,
And lifted hands ? If there be one among you 450
Whom grief has left a tongue, speak for the rest.

1st Pr. Oh, father of thy country !
To thee these knees are bent, these eyes are lifted,
As to a visible divinity.

A prince on whom Heav'n safely might repose
The business of mankind : for Providence
Might on thy " careful " bosom sleep secure,
And leave her task to thee.

But where's the glory of thy former acts ?
Ev'n that's destroy'd, when none shall live to speak it. 460

Millions of subjects shalt thou have; but mute.
 A people of the dead; a crowded desert;
 A midnight silence at the noon of day.

OEdip. Oh, were our gods as ready with their pity,
 As I with mine, this presence should be throng'd
 With all I left alive; and my sad eyes
 Not search in vain for friends, whose promis'd sight
 Flatter'd my toils of war.

1st Pr. Twice our deliverer——

OEdip. Nor are now your vows
 Address'd to one who sleeps.

470

When this unwelcome news first reach'd my ears,
 Dymas was sent to Delphos, to enquire
 The cause and cure of this contagious ill:
 And is this day return'd; but since his message
 Concerns the public, I refus'd to hear it,
 But in this general presence: let him speak.

Dym. A dreadful answer from the hallow'd urn,
 And sacred Tripod did the priestess give,
 In these mysterious words.

480

THE ORACLE. "Shed in a cursed hour, by cursed hand,
 Blood-royal unreveng'd has curs'd the land.
 When Laius' death is expiated well,
 Your plague shall cease. The rest let Laius tell."

OEdip. Dreadful indeed! Blood! and a king's blood too;
 And such a king's, and by his subjects shed!
 (Else why this curse on Thebes?) no wonder then
 If monsters, wars, and plagues revenge such crimes!
 If Heav'n be just, its whole artillery,
 All must be empty'd on us: not one bolt
 Shall err from Thebes; but more be called for, more:
 New moulded thunder, of a larger size;

490

Driv'n whole by Jove. What, touch anointed pow'r!
Then, gods, beware; Jove would himself be next,
Could you but reach him too.

2d Pr. We mourn the sad remembrance.

OEdip. Well you may.

Worse than a plague infects you: y'are devoted
To mother earth, and to th' infernal pow'rs:
Hell has a right in you: I thank you, gods,
That I'm no Theban born. How my blood curdles!
As if this curse touch'd me, and touch'd me nearer
Than all this presence!—Yes, 'tis a king's blood,
And I, a king, am ty'd in deeper bonds
To expiate this blood——But where, from whom,
Or how must I atone it? Tell me, Thebans,
How Laius fell; for a confus'd report
Pass'd thro' my years, when first I took the crown:
But full of hurry, like a morning dream,
It vanish'd in the business of the day.

500

510

1st Pr. He went in private forth; but thinly follow'd;
And ne'er return'd to Thebes.

OEdip. Nor any from him? Came there no attendant?
None to bring the news?

2d Pr. But one; and he so wounded;
He scarce drew breath to speak some few faint words.

OEdip. What were they? Something may be learned from
thence.

1st Pr. He said a band of robbers watch'd their passage;
Who took advantage of a narrow way
To murder Laius and the rest: himself
Left too for dead.

520

OEdip. Made you no more enquiry,
But took this bare relation.

2d Pr. 'Twas neglected:

For then the monster Sphinx began to rage;
And present cares soon buried the remote;
So was it hush'd, and never since reviv'd.

OEdip. Mark, Thebans, mark!

Just then, the Sphinx began to rage among you;
The gods took hold ev'n of th' offending minute, 530
And dated thence your woes: thence will I trace them.

1st Pr. 'Tis just thou shouldst.

OEdip. Hear then this dreadful imprecation; hear it:
'Tis laid on all; not any one exempt:

Bear witness, Heav'n, avenge it on the perjurd.
If any Theban born, if any stranger
Reveal this murder, or produce its author,
Ten Attic talents be his just reward:
But, if for fear, for favour, or for hire,
The murd'rer he conceal, the curse of Thebes 540
Fall heavy on his head: unite our plagues,
Ye gods, and place them there: from fire and water,
Converse, and all things common, be he banish'd.
But for the murderer's self, unfound by man,
Find him, ye pow'rs cœlestial and infernal;
And the same fate, or worse than Laius met,
Let be his lot: his children be accurst;
His wife and kindred, all of his be curs'd.

Both Pr. Confirm it, Heav'n!

Enter JOCASTA, attended by Women.

Joc. At your devotions! Heav'n succeed your wishes;
And bring th' effect of these your pray'rs 551
On you, on me, and all.

Pr. Avert this omen, Heav'n!

OEdip. Oh, fatal sound: unfortunate Jocasta!
What hast thou said? An ill hour hast thou chosen

For these foreboding words ! Why, we were cursing !

Joc. Then may that curse fall only where you laid it.

OEdip. Speak no more !

For all thou say'st is ominous : we were cursing ;

And that dire imprecation hast thou fasten'd

560

On Thebes, and thee and me, and all of us.

Joc. Are then my blessings turn'd into a curse ?

Oh, unkind OEdipus ! My former lord

Thought me his blessing : be thou like my Laius.

OEdip. What, yet again ? The third time has thou curs'd
me :

This imprecation was for Laius' death,

And thou hast wish'd me like him.

Joc. Horror seizes me !

OEdip. Why dost thou gaze upon me ? Pr'ythee, love,

Take off thy eye ; it burthens me too much.

570

Joc. The more I look, the more I find of Laius :

His speech, his garb, his action ; nay, his frown ;

(For I have seen it ;) but ne'er bent on me.

OEdip. Are we so like ?

Joc. In all things but his love.

OEdip. I love thee more : so well I love, words cannot
speak how well.

No pious son ne'er lov'd his mother more

Than I my dear Jocasta.

Joc. I love you too

The self-same way : and when you chid, methought

580

A mother's love start up in your defence,

And bade me not be angry : be not you :

For I love Laius still, as wives should love :

But you more tenderly ; as part of me ;

And when I have you in my arms, methinks

I lull my child asleep.

OEdip. Then we are blest :
And all these curses sweep along the skies
Like empty clouds ; but drop not on our heads.

Joc. I have not joy'd an hour since you departed, 590
For public miseries, and for private fears ;
But this blest meeting has o'erpaid 'em all.
Good fortune that comes seldom, comes more welcome.
All I can wish for now, is your consent
To make my brother happy.

OEdip. How, Jocasta ?

Joc. By marriage with his niece, Eurydice ?

OEdip. Uncle and niece : they are too near, my love :
'Tis too like incest : 'tis offence to kind :
Had I not promis'd, were there no Adrastus, 600
No choice but Creon left her of mankind,
They should not marry ; speak no more of it ;
The thought disturbs me.

Joc. Heav'n can never bless
A vow so broken, which I made to Creon ;
Remember, he's my brother.

OEdip. That's the bar ;
And she thy daughter : nature would abhor,
To be forc'd back again upon herself,
And, like a whirlpool, swallow her own streams. 610

Joc. Be not displeas'd : I'll move the suit no more.

OEdip. No, do not ; for, I know not why, it shakes me
When I but think on incest. Move we forward
To thank the gods for my success, and pray
To wash the guilt of royal blood away. [Exeunt.

ACT II. SCENE I.

*An open Gallery. A Royal Bed-chamber being supposed behind.
The time, Night. Thunder, &c. Enter HÆMON, ALCANDER, and PYRACMON.*

Hæmon.

SURE 'tis the end of all things ; fate has torn
The lock of time off, and his head is now
The ghastly ball of round eternity !
Call you these peals of thunder but the yawn
Of bellowing clouds ? by Jove, they seem to me
The world's last groans ; and those vast sheets of flame
Are its last blaze ! The tapers of the god,
The sun and moon, run down like waxen globes ;
The shooting stars end all in purple jellies,
And chaos is at hand.

10

Pyr. 'Tis midnight, yet there's not a Theban sleeps,
But such as ne'er must wake. All crowd about
The palace, and implore, as from a god,
Help of the king ; who, from the battlement,
By the red light'ning's glare, descry'd afar,
Atones the angry pow'rs.

[Thunder, &c.]

Hæm. Ha ! Pyracmon, look ;
Behold, Alcander, from yon west of Heav'n,
The perfect figures of a man and woman :
A sceptre bright with gems in each right hand,
Their flowing robes of dazzling purple made,
Distinctly yonder in that point they stand,
Just west : a bloody red stains all the place ;
And see, their faces are quite hid in clouds.

20

Pyr. Clusters of golden stars hang o'er their heads,

And seem so crowded, that they burst upon them :
All dart at once their baleful influence
In leaking fire.

Alc. Long-bearded comets stick,
Like flaming porcupines, to their left sides, 30
As they would shoot their quills into their hearts.

Ham. But see ! the king, and queen, and all the court !
Did ever day or night shew aught like this ?

*[Thunders again. The Scene draws, and discovers the
Prodigies.]*

*Enter OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, EURYDICE, ADRASTUS, and all
coming forward with amazement.*

OEdip. Answer, you Pow'rs divine ; spare all this noise,
This rack of Heav'n, and speak your fatal pleasure.
Why breaks yon dark and dusky orb away ?
Why, from the bleeding womb of monstrous night,
Burst forth such myriads of abortive stars ?
Ha ! my Jocasta, look ! the silver moon !
A settling crimson stains her beauteous face ! 40
She's all o'er blood ! and look, behold again,
What mean the mystic heav'ns she journeys on ?
A vast eclipse darkens the labouring planet :
Sound there, sound all our instruments of war,
Clarions, and trumpets, silver, brass, and iron,
And beat a thousand drums to help her labour.

Adr. 'Tis vain ; you see the prodigies continue ;
Let's gaze no more, the gods are humorous.

OEdip. Forbear, rash man——Once more I ask your
pleasure !

If that the glow-worm light of human reason 50
Might dare to offer at immortal knowledge,
And cope with gods, why all this storm of nature ?

Why do the rocks split, and why rolls the sea?
 Why these portents in Heav'n, and plagues on earth?
 Why yon gigantic forms, ethereal monsters?
 Alas! is all this but to fright the dwarfs
 Which your own hands have made? Then be it so,
 Or if the fates resolve some expiation
 For murder'd Laius: hear me, hear me, gods!
 Hear me thus prostrate; spare this groaning land,
 Save innocent Thebes, stop the tyrant death;
 Do this, and lo! I stand up an oblation
 To meet your swiftest and severest anger.
 Shoot all at once, and strike me to the centre.

*[The Cloud draws that veil'd the Heads of the Figures of the
 Sky, and shews them crowned with the Names of OEDIPUS
 and JOCASTA written above in great Characters of Gold.]*

Adr. Either I dream, and all my cooler senses
 Are vanish'd with that cloud that fleets away,
 Or just above those two majestic heads,
 I see, I read distinctly in large gold,
 Oedipus and Jocasta.

Alc. I read the same.

Adr. 'Tis wonderful; yet ought not man to wade
 Too far in the vast deep of destiny.

[Thunder, and the Prodigies vanish.]

Joc. My lord, my Oedipus, why gaze you now,
 When the whole heav'n is clear, as if the gods
 Had some new monsters made. Will you not turn,
 And bless your people, who devour each word
 You breathe?

OEdip. It shall be so.

Yes, I will die, oh, Thebes, to save thee!
 Draw from my heart my blood, with more content
 Than e'er I wore thy crown. Yet, oh, Jocasta!

By all th' endearments of miraculous love,
 By all our languishings, our fears in pleasure,
 Which oft have made us wonder; here I swear,
 On thy fair hand, upon thy breast I swear,
 I cannot call to mind, from budding childhood
 To blooming youth, a crime by me committed,
 For which the awful gods should doom my death.

Joc. 'Tis not you, my lord,
 But he who murder'd Laius, frees the land :
 Were you, which is impossible, the man,
 Perhaps my poignard first should drink your blood;
 But you are innocent, as your Jocasta,
 From crimes like those. This made me violent
 To save your life, which you unjust would lose :
 Nor can you comprehend, with deepest thought,
 The horrid agony you cast me in,
 When you resolv'd to die.

OEdip. Is't possible?

Joc. Alas, why start you so? Her stiff'ning grief,
 Who saw her children slaughter'd all at once,
 Was dull to mine : methinks I should have made
 My bosom bare against the armed god,
 To save my *Ædipus* !

OEdip. I pray, no more.

Joc. You've silenc'd me, my lord.

OEdip. Pardon me, dear Jocasta !
 Pardon a heart that sinks with sufferings,
 And can but vent itself in sobs and murmurs :
 Yet to restore my peace, I'll find him out.
 Yes, yes, you gods! you shall have ample vengeance
 On Laius' murderer. O, the traitor's name!
 I'll know't, I will; art shall be conjur'd for it,
 And nature all unravell'd,

Joc. Sacred sir——

OEdip. Rage will have way, and 'tis but just; I'll fetch him,
 Tho' lodg'd in air, upon a dragon's wing,
 Tho' rocks should hide him: nay, he shall be dragg'd
 From hell, if charms can hurry him along:
 His ghost shall be, by sage Tiresias' power, 120
 (Tiresias, that rules all beneath the moon)
 Confin'd to flesh, to suffer death once more;
 And then be plung'd in his first fires again.

Enter CREON.

Cre. My lord,
 Tiresias attends your pleasure.

OEdip. Haste, and bring him in.
 O, my Jocasta, Eurydice, Adrastus,
 Creon, and all ye Thebans, now the end
 Of plagues, of madness, murders, prodigies,
 Draws on: this battle of the heav'ns and earth 130
 Shall, by his wisdom, be reduc'd to peace.

*Enter TIRESIAS, leaning on a Staff, led by his Daughter MANTO,
 followed by other Thebans.*

O thou, whose most aspiring mind
 Knows all the business of the courts above,
 Opens the closets of the gods, and dares
 To mix with Jove himself and fate at council;
 O prophet, answer me, declare aloud
 The traitor who conspir'd the death of Laius:
 Or be they more, who from malignant stars
 Have drawn this plague that blasts unhappy Thebes?

Tir. We must no more than fate commissions us 140
 To tell; yet something, and of moment, I'll unfold,
 If that the god would wake; I feel him now,

" Like a strong spirit charm'd into a tree,
 " That leaps and moves the wood without a wind :
 " The roused god, as all this while he lay,
 " Intomb'd alive, starts and dilates himself ;"
 He struggles, and he tears my aged trunk
 With holy fury, " my old arteries burst ;
 " My rivell'd skin,
 " Like parchment, crackles at the hallow'd fire ;
 " I shall be young again : " Manto, my daughter,
 " Thou hast a voice that might have sav'd the bard
 " Of Thrace, and forc'd the raging bacchanals,
 " With lifted prongs, to listen to thy airs : "
 O charm this god, this fury in my bosom,
 Lull him with tuneful notes, and artful strings,
 With pow'rful strains ; " Manto, my lovely child, "
 Sooth the unruly godhead to be mild.

150

SONG to APOLLO.

*Phæbus, god below'd by men,
 At thy dawn, every beast is rous'd in his den ;
 At thy setting, all the birds of thy absence complain,
 And we die, all die till the morning comes again.
 Phæbus, god below'd by men !
 Idol of the Eastern kings,
 Awful as the god who flings
 His thunder round, and the lightning wings ;
 God of songs, and Orphean strings,
 Who to this mortal bosom brings
 All harmonious heav'nly things !
 Thy drowsy prophet to revive,
 Ten thousand thousand forms before him drive ;
 With chariots and horses all o' fire awake him,
 Convulsions, and furies, and prophecies shake him :*

160

170

*Let him tell it in groans, tho' he bend with the load,
Tho' he burst with the weight of the terrible god.*

Ter. The wretch, who shed the blood of old Labdacides,
Lives, and is great ;
But cruel greatness ne'er was long :
The first of Laius' blood his life did seize,
And urg'd his fate, 180
Which else had lasting been and strong.
The wretch, who Laius kill'd, must bleed or fly ;
Or Thebes, consum'd with plagues, in ruins lie.

OEdip. The first of Laius' blood ! pronounce the person ;
May the god roar from thy prophetic mouth,
That even the dead may start up, to behold.
Name him, I say, that most accursed wretch,
For, by the stars, he dies !
Speak, I command thee ;
By Phœbus, speak ; for sudden death's his doom ; 190
Here shall he fall, bleed on this very spot ;
His name, I charge thee once more, speak.

Tir. 'Tis lost,
Like what we think can never shun remembrance ;
Yet of a sudden's gone beyond the clouds.

OEdip. Fetch it from thence ; I'll have it, wherce'er it be.

Cre. Let me intreat you, sacred sir, be calm,
And Creon shall point out the great offender.
'Tis true, respect of nature might enjoin
Me silence at another time ; but, oh, 200
Much more the pow'r of my eternal love !
That, that should strike me dumb : yet, Thebes, my country—
I'll break through all to succour thee, poor city.

O, I must speak.

OEdip. Speak then, if aught thou know'st :

As much thou seem'st to know, delay no longer.

Cre. O beauty ! O illustrious royal maid !

To whom my vows were ever paid till now,
And with such modest, chaste, and pure affection,
The coldest nymph might read 'em without blushing. 210
Art thou the murd'ress, then, of wretched Laius ?
And I, must I accuse thee ? Oh, my tears !
Why will you fall in so abhor'd a cause ?
But that thy beauteous, barbarous hand destroy'd
Thy father (O monstrous act !) both gods
And men at once take notice.

OEdip. Eurydice !

Eur. Traitor, go on ; I scorn thy little malice,
And knowing more my perfect innocence,
Than gods and men, then how much more than thee, 220
Who art their opposite, and form'd a liar,
I thus disdain thee ! Thou once didst talk of love ;
Because I hate thy love,
Thou dost accuse me.

Adr. Villain, inglorious villain,
And traitor, doubly damn'd, who durst blaspheme
The spotless virtue of the brightest beauty ;
Thou dy'st : nor shall the sacred majesty

[*Draws and wounds him.*]

That guards this place, preserve thee from my rage.

OEdip. Disarm them both. Prince, I shall make you
know 230

That I can tame you twice. Guards, seize him.

Adr. Sir,

I must acknowledge in another cause
Repentance might abash me ; but I glory
In this, and smile to see the traitor's blood.

OEdip. Creon, you shall be satisfy'd at full:

Cre. My hurt is nothing, sir ; but I appeal
To wise Tiresias, if my accusation
Be not most true. The first of Laius' blood
Gave him his death. Is there a prince before her ? 240
Then she is faultless, and I ask her pardon.
And may this blood ne'er cease to drop, O Thebes,
If pity of thy sufferings did not move me
To shew the cure which Heav'n itself prescrib'd.

Eur. Yes, Thebans, I will die to save your lives,
More willingly than you can wish my fate ;
But let this good, this wise, this holy man,
Pronounce my sentence : for to fall by him,
By the vile breath of that prodigious villain,
Would sink my soul, tho' I should die a martyr. 250

Adr. Unhand me, slaves. O mightiest of kings,
See at your feet a prince not us'd to kneel ;
Touch not Eurydice, by all the gods,
As you would save your Thebes, but take my life :
For should she perish, Heav'n would heap plagues on plagues,
Rain sulphur down, hurl kindled bolts
Upon your guilty heads.

Cre. You turn to gallantry, what is but justice :
Proof will be easy made. Adrastus was
The robber who bereft th' unhappy king 260
Of life ; because he flatly had deny'd
To make so poor a prince his son-in-law :
Therefore 'twere fit that both should perish.

1st Theb. Both, let both die.

All Theb. Both, both ; let them die.

Œdip. Hence, you wild herd ! For your ringleader here,
He shall be made example. Hæmon, take him.

1st Theb. Mercy ! O mercy !

Œdip. Mutiny in my presence !
Hence, let me see that busy face no more. 270

Tir. Thebans, what madness makes you drunk with rage?
 Enough of guilty death's already acted;
 Fierce Creon has accused Eurydice,
 With prince Adrastus; which the god reproves
 By inward checks, and leaves their fates in doubt.

OEdip. Therefore instruct us what remains to do,
 Or suffer; for I feel a sleep like death
 Upon me, and I sigh to be at rest.

Tir. Since that the pow'rs divine refuse to clear
 The mystic deed, I'll to the Grove of Furies;
 There I can force the infernal gods to shew
 Their horrid forms; each trembling ghost shall rise,
 And leave their grisly king without a waiter.
 For prince Adrastus and Eurydice
 My life's engag'd; I'll guard them in the fane,
 Till the dark mysteries of hell are done.
 Follow me, princes. Thebans, all to rest.
 O, Ædipus, to-morrow—but no more:
 If that thy wakeful genius will permit,
 Indulge thy brain this night with softer slumbers:
 To-morrow, O to-morrow!—sleep, my son;
 And in prophetic dreams thy fate be shewn.

[*Exeunt Tir. Adr. Eur. Man, and Thebans.*]

OEdip. To bed, my fair, my dear, my best Jocasta.
 After the toils of war, 'tis wondrous strange
 Our loves should thus be dash'd. One moment's thought,
 And I'll approach the arms of my belov'd.

Joc. Consume whole years in care, so now and then
 I may have leave to feed my famish'd eyes
 With one short passing glance, and sigh my vows:
 This and no more, my lord, is all the passion
 Of languishing Jocasta.

OEdip. Thou softest, sweetest of the world! good night.
 Nay, she is beauteous too; yet, mighty love!

280

290

300

[*Exit.*]

I never offer'd to obey thy laws,
 But an unusual chillness came upon me ;
 An unknown hand still check'd my forward joy,
 Dash'd me with blushes, tho' no light was near ;
 That even the act became a violation.

Pyr. He's strangely thoughtful.

OEdip. Hark ! Who was that ? Ha ! Creon, didst thou
 call me ? 310

Cre. Not I, my gracious lord, nor any here.

OEdip. That's strange ! methought I heard a doleful
 voice

Cry Œdipus—The prophet bade me sleep.

He talk'd of dreams, of visions, and to-morrow !

I'll muse no more, come what will or can.

My thoughts are clearer than unclouded stars ;

And with those thoughts I'll rest. Creon, good night.

[Exit with Hæm.]

Cre. Sleep seal your eyes up, sir, eternal sleep.

But if he sleep and wake again, O all

Tormenting dreams, wild horrors of the night, 320

And hags of fancy, wing him through the air :

From precipices hurl him headlong down ;

Charybdis' roar, and death be set before him.

Alc. Your curses have already ta'en effect ;

For he looks very sad.

Cre. May he be rooted where he stands for ever ;

His eye-balls never move, brows be unbent,

His blood, his entrails, liver, heart, and bowels,

Be blacker than the place I wish him, hell.

Pyr. No more ; you tear yourself, but vex not him : 330

Methinks 'twere brave this night to force the temple,

While blind Tiresias conjures up the fiends,

And pass the time with nice Eurydice.

Alc. Try promises and threats, and if all fail,
Since hell's broke loose, why should not you be mad!
Ravish, and leave her dead with her Adrastus.

Cre. Were the globe mine, I'd give a province hourly
For such another thought. Lust and revenge!
To stab at once the only man I hate,
And to enjoy the woman whom I love!
I ask no more of my auspicious stars.
The rest as fortune please; so but this night
She play me fair, why, let her turn for ever.

340

Enter HÆMON.

Hæm. My lord, the troubled king is gone to rest;
Yet, ere he slept, commanded me to clear
The antechambers: none must dare be near him.

Cre. Hæmon, you do your duty— *[Thunder.]*
And we obey.—The night grows yet more dreadful!
'Tis just that all retire to their devotions.
The gods are angry; but to-morrow's dawn,
If prophets do not lie, will make all clear.

350

As they go off *ŒDIPUS enters, walking asleep in his Shirt, with
a Dagger in his right-hand, and a Taper in his left.*

OEdip. O, my Jocasta! 'tis for this the wet
Starv'd soldier lies on the cold ground;
For this he bears the storms
Of winter camps, and freezes in his arms:
To be thus circled, to be thus embrac'd;
That I could hold thee ever!—Ha! where art thou?
What means this melancholy light, that seems
The gloom of glowing embers?
The curtain's drawn; and see, she's here again!
Jocasta? ha! what, fall'n asleep so soon?

360

How fares my love ? This taper will inform me.
 Ha! lightning blast me, thunder
 Rivet me ever to Prometheus' rock,
 And vultures gnaw out my incestuous heart.
 By all the gods, my mother Merope !
 My sword, a dagger ! Ha, who waits there ? Slaves,
 My sword. What, Hæmon, dar'st thou, villain, stop me :
 With thy own poignard perish. Ha ! who's this ?
 Or is't a change of death ? By all my honours, 370
 New murder ; thou hast slain old Polybus :
 Incest and parricide, thy father's murdered !
 Out, thou infernal flame : now all is dark,
 All blind and dismal, most triumphant mischief !
 And now, while thus I stalk about the room,
 I challenge fate to find another wretch
 Like CEdipus ! [Thunder, &c.]

Enter JOCASTA attended, with Lights, in a night-gown :

Night, horror, death, confusion, hell, and furies !
 Where am I ? O, Jocasta, let me hold thee :
 Thus to my bosom, ages let me grasp thee, 380
 All that the hardest temper'd weather'd flesh,
 With fiercest human spirit inspir'd, can dare,
 Or do, I dare ; but, O ye pow'rs, this was
 By infinite degrees too much for man.
 Methinks my deafen'd ears
 Are burst ; my eyes, as if they had been knock'd
 By some tempestuous hand, shoot flashing fire.
 That sleep should do this !
 Joc. Then my fears were true.

Methought I heard your voice, and yet I doubted, 390
 Now roaring like the ocean, when the winds
 Fight with the waves ; now, in a still small tone

Your dying accents fell, as racking ships,
After the dreadful yell, sink murm'ring down,
And bubble up a noise.

OEdip. Trust me, thou fairest, best of all thy kind,
None ere in dreams was tortur'd so before.
Yet what most shocks the niceness of my temper,
Ev'n far beyond the killing of my father,
And my own death, is that this horrid sleep
Dash'd my sick fancy with an act of incest :
I dream'd, Jocasta, that thou wert my mother ;
Which, tho' impossible, so damps my spirits,
That I could do a mischief on myself,
Lest I should sleep and dream the like again.

400

Joc. O, *Ædipus*, too well I understand you !
I know the wrath of Heav'n, the care of Thebes,
The cries of its inhabitants, war's toils,
And thousand other labours of the state,
Are all referr'd to you, and ought to take you
For ever from Jocasta.

410

OEdip. Life of my life, and treasure of my soul,
Heav'n knows I love thee.

Joc. O, you think me vile,
And of an inclination so ignoble,
That I must hide me from your eyes for ever.
Be witness, gods, and strike Jocasta dead,
If an immodest thought, or low desire,
Inflam'd my breast, since first our loves were lighted.

OEdip. O rise, and add not by thy cruel kindness,
A grief more sensible than all my torments,
Thou think'st my dreams are forg'd ; but by thyself,
The greatest oath I swear, they are most true :
But, be they what they will, I here dismiss them.
Begone, chimæras, to your mother clouds.

420

Is there a fault in us ? Have we not search'd
The womb of Heav'n, examin'd all the entrails
Of birds and beasts, and tired the prophet's art ?
Yet what avails ? He, and the gods together,
Seem, like physicians, at a loss to help us ;
Therefore, like wretches that have linger'd long,
We'll snatch the strongest cordial of our love.—
To bed, my fair.

430

Ghost [*within.*] *Œdipus* !

OEdip. Ha ! who calls ?

Didst thou not hear a voice ?

Joc. Alas ! I did.

Ghost. *Jocasta* !

Joc. O, my love, my lord, support me ?

OEdip. Call louder, till you burst your airy forms.

440

Rest on my hand. Thus arm'd with innocence,

I'll face these babbling dæmons of the air :

In spite of ghosts, I'll on.

Tho' round my bed the furies plant their charms,

I'll break them with *Jocasta* in my arms ;

Clasp'd in the folds of love, I'll wait my doom,

And act my joys, tho' thunder shake the room.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III. SCENE I.

A dark Grove. Enter CREON and DIOCLES.

Creon.

'Tis better not to be, than be unhappy.

Dioc. What mean you by these words ?

Cre. 'Tis better not to be, than to be *Creon*.

A thinking soul is punishment enough ;

But when 'tis great, like mine, and wretched too,
Then every thought draws blood.

Dioc. You are not wretched.

Cre. I am : my soul's ill-married to my body ;
I would be young, be handsome, be belov'd :
Could I but breathe myself into Adrastus——

Dioc. You rave ; call home your thoughts.

Cre. I pr'ythee let my soul take air awhile :
Were she in *Œdipus*, I were a king ;
Then I had kill'd a monster, gain'd a battle,
And had my rival pris'ner ; brave, brave actions :
Why have not I done these ?

Dioc. Your fortune hinder'd.

Cre. There's it. I have a soul to do them all :
But fortune will have nothing done that's great
But by young handsome fools : body and brawn
Do all her work : *Hercules* was a fool,
And straight grew famous : a mad boist'rous fool :
Nay, worse, a woman's fool.
Fool is the stuff, of which Heav'n makes a hero.

Dioc. A serpent ne'er becomes a flying dragon,
Till he has eat a serpent.

Cre. Goes it there ?

I understand thee ; I must kill *Adrastus*.

Dioc. Or not enjoy your mistress.

Eurydice and he are pris'ners here.
But will not long be so : this tell-tale ghost
Perhaps will clear them both.

Cre. Well ; 'tis resolv'd.

Dioc. The princess walks this way ;
You must not meet her
Till this be done.

Cre. I must.

Dioc. She hates your sight ;
And more since you accus'd her.

Cre. Urge it not.
I cannot stay to tell thee my design,
For she's too near.

48

Enter EURYDICE.

How, madam, were your thoughts employ'd ?

Eur. On death and thee.

Cre. Then they were not well sorted : life and me
Had been the better match.

Eur. No, I was thinking
On two the most detested things in nature :
And they are death and thee.

49

Cre. The thought of death to one near death is dreadful !

O, 'tis a fearful thing to be no more.

Or if to be, to wander after death ;

To walk, as spirits do, in breaks all day ;

And, when the darkness comes, to glide in paths

That lead to graves ; and in the silent vault,

Where lies your own pale shroud, to hover o'er it,

Striving to enter your forbidden corpse ;

And often, often, vainly breathe your ghost

Into your lifeless lips :

Then, like a lone benighted traveller,

60

Shut out from lodging, shall your groans be answer'd

By whistling winds, whose every blast will shake

Your tender form to atoms.

Eur. Must I be this thin being, and thus wander,
No quiet after death ?

Cre. None : you must leave

This beauteous body ; all this youth and freshness

Must be no more the object of desire,

But a cold lump of clay;
Which then your discontented ghost will leave,
And loath its former lodging.
This is the best of what comes after death,
Ev'n to the best.

70

Eur. What then shall be thy lot!
Eternal torments, baths of boiling sulphur;
Vicissitudes of fires, and then of frosts:
And an old guardian fiend, ugly as thou art,
To hollow in thy ears at ev'ry lash,
This for Eurydice: these for her Adrastus!

Cre. For her Adrastus!

80

Eur. Yes, for her Adrastus;
For death shall ne'er divide us. Death! what's death?

"*Dioc.* You seem'd to fear it.

"*Eur.* But I more fear Creon:

"To take that hunch-back'd monster in my arms,

"Th' excrescence of a man.

"*Dioc.* [*To Cre.*] See what you've gain'd.

"*Eur.* Death only can be dreadful to the bad:

"To innocence, 'tis like a bug-bear dress'd

"To frighten children; pull but off his mask,

90

"And he'll appear a friend."

Cre. You talk too slightly

Of death and hell. Let me inform you better.

Eur. You best can tell the news of your own country

Dioc. Nay, now you are too sharp.

Eur. Can I be so to one who has accus'd me
Of murder and of parricide!

Cre. You provok'd me:

And yet I only did thus far accuse you,
As next of blood to Laius: be advis'd,
And you may live.

100

Eur. The means ?

Cre. 'Tis offer'd you ;

The fool Adrastus has accus'd himself.

Eur. He has indeed, to take the guilt from me.

Cre. He says he loves you ; if he does, 'tis well :

He ne'er could prove it in a better time.

Eur. Then death must be his recompence for love !

Cre. 'Tis a fool's just reward ;

The wise can make a better use of life :

110

But 'tis the young man's pleasure ; his ambition :

I grudge him not that favour.

Eur. When he's dead

Where shall I find his equal ?

Cre. Every where.

Fine empty things, like him ;

The court swarms with them.

Fine fighting things ; in camps they are so common,

Crows feed on nothing else ; plenty of fools ;

A glut of them in Thebes.

120

And fortune still takes care they should be seen :

She places them aloft, o' th' topmost spoke

Of all her wheel : fools are the daily work

Of nature ; her vocation ; if she form

A man, she loses by't, 'tis too expensive ;

'Twould make ten fools : a man's a prodigy.

Eur. That is, a Creon : O thou black detractor,

" Who spitt'st thy venom against gods and men !

" Thou enemy of eyes :"

Thou, who lov'st nothing but what nothing loves,

130

And that's thyself : who hast conspir'd against

My life and fame, to make me loath'd by all,

And only fit for thee.

But for Adrastus' death, good gods, his death !
What curse shall I invent ?

Dioc. No more—he's here.

Eur. He shall be ever here.

He who would give his life, give up his fame —

Enter ADRASTUS.

If all the excellence of woman-kind
Were mine——No, 'tis too little all for him ;
Were I made up of endless, endless joys——

140

Adr. And so thou art :

The man who loves like me,
Would think ev'n infamy, the worst of ills,
Were cheaply purchas'd, were thy love the price.
Uncrown'd, a captive, nothing left but honour,
'Tis the last thing a prince should throw away :
But when the storm grows loud, and threatens love,
Throw ev'n that over-board ; for love's the jewel,
And last it must be kept.

150

Cre. [*To Dioc.*] Work him, be sure,
To rage—He's passionate ;
Make him th' aggressor.

Dioc. Oh, false love ! false honour !

Cre. Dissembled both and false !

Adr. Dar'st thou say this to me ?

Cre. To you ! why, what are you, that I should fear you ?
I am not Laius. Hear me, Prince of Argos.

You give what's nothing, when you give your honour ;
'Tis gone ; 'tis lost in battle. For your love,
Vows made in wine are not so false as that :

160

You kill'd her father ; you confess'd you did :
A mighty argument to prove your passion to the daughter !

Adr. [*Aside.*] Gods, must I bear this brand, and not retort
The lie to his foul throat!

Dioc. Basely you kill'd him.

Adr. [*Aside.*] Oh, I burn inward! my blood's all o' fire!
Alcides, when the poison'd shirt sat closest,
Had but an ague-fit to this my fever.

Yet, for Eurydice, ev'n this I'll suffer, 170
To free my love—— Well, then, I kill'd him basely.

Cre. Fairly, I'm sure, you could not.

Dioc. Nor alone.

Cre. You had your fellow-thieves about you, prince:
They conquer'd, and you kill'd.

Adr. [*Aside.*] Down, swelling heart!
'Tis for thy princess, all—Oh, my Eurydice! [*To her.*]

Eur. [*To him.*] Reproach not thus the weakness of my sex,
As if I could not bear a shameful death,
Rather than see you burden'd with a crime 180
Of which I know you free.

Cre. You do ill, madam,
To let your headlong love triumph o'er nature.
Dare you defend your father's murderer?

Eur. You know he kill'd him not.

Cre. Let him say so.

Dioc. See, he stands mute.

Cre. Oh, pow'r of conscience! ev'n in wicked men
It works, it stings, it will not let him utter
One syllable, one No, to clear himself 190
From the most base, detested, horrid act,
That e'er could stain a villain, not a prince.

Adr. Ha! villain!

Cre. Echo to him, groves; cry villain!

Adr. Let me consider—Did I murder Laius,
Thus like a villain?

Cre. Best revoke your words,
And say, you kill'd him not.

Adr. Not like a villain; pr'ythee, change me that
For any other lye. 200

Dioc. No, villain! villain!

Cre. You kill'd him not——Proclaim your innocence,
Accuse the princess: so I knew 'twould be.

Adr. I thank thee; thou instruct'st me.
No matter how I kill'd him.

Cre. [*Aside.*] Cool'd again!

Eur. Thou, who usurp'st the sacred name of conscience,
Did not thy own self declare him innocent?
To me declare him so? The king shall know it.

Cre. You will not be believ'd; for I'll forswear it. 210

Eur. What's now thy conscience?

Cre. 'Tis my slave, my drudge, my supple glove,
My upper garment, to put on, throw off,
As I think best: 'tis my obedient conscience.

Adr. Infamous wretch!

Cre. My conscience shall not do me the ill office
To save a rival's life; when thou art dead
(As dead thou shalt be, or be yet more base
Than thou think'st me,

By forfeiting her life to save thy own)
Know this, and let it grate thy very soul,
She shall be mine: (she is, if vows were binding)
Mark me, the fruit of all thy faith and passion,
Ev'n of thy foolish death, shall all be mine, 220

Adr. Thine! say'st thou, monster?

Shall my love be thine?

Oh, I can bear no more!

Thy cunning engines have with labour rais'd
My heavy anger, like a mighty weight,

To fall and strike thee dead.

230

See here thy nuptials ; see, thou rash Ixion,

[*Draws.*

Thy promis'd Juno vanish'd in a cloud,

And in her room avenging thunder rolls

To blast thee thus——Come both——

[*Both draw.*

Cre. 'Tis what I wish'd——

Now see whose arm can launch the surer bolt,

And who's the better Jove——

[*Fight.*

Eur. Help ! murder ! help !

Enter HÆMON and Guards, run betwixt them, and beat down their Swords.

Hæm. Hold ! hold your impious hands ! I think the furies,
To whom this grove is hallow'd, have inspir'd you. 240

Now, by my soul, the holiest earth of Thebes

You have profan'd with war. Nor tree, nor plant

Grows here, but what is fed with magic juice,

All full of human souls, that cleave their barks

To dance at midnight by the moon's pale beams.

At least two hundred years these reverend shades

Have known no blood, but of black sheep and oxen,

Shed by the priest's own hand to Proserpine.

Adr. Forgive a stranger's ignorance—I knew not
The honours of the place. 250

Hæm. Thou, Creon, didst.

Not Œdipus, were all his foes here lodg'd,

Durst violate the religion of these groves,

To touch one single hair ; but must, unarm'd,

Parle, as in truce, or surlily avoid

What most he long'd to kill.

Cre. I drew not first ;

But in my own defence.

Adr. I was provok'd

Beyond man's patience ; all reproach could urge
Was us'd to kindle one not apt to bear.

260

Hæm. 'Tis Œdipus, not I, must judge this act.
Lord Creon, you and Diocles retire ;
Tiresias and the brotherhood of priests
Approach the place. None at these rites assist,
But you th' accus'd, who by the mouth of Laius
Must be absolv'd or doom'd.

Adr. I bear my fortune.

Eur. And I provoke my trial.

270

Hæm. 'Tis at hand :

For see, the Prophet comes with vervain crown'd,
The priests with yew ; a venerable band.
We leave you to the gods.

[*Exit Hæmon, with Creon and Diocles.*]

*Enter TIRESIAS, led by MANTO ; the Priests follow, all clothed
in long black habits.*

Tir. Approach, ye lovers :

Ill-fated pair, whom, seeing not, I know.
This day your kindly stars in Heav'n were join'd ;
When lo, an envious planet interpos'd,
And threaten'd both with death. I fear, I fear.

Eur. Is there no god so much a friend to love,
Who can controul the malice of our fate ?
Are they all deaf ? Or have the giants Heav'n ?

280

Tir. The gods are just——

But how can finite measure infinite ?
Reason ! alas, it does not know itself !
Yet man, vain man, would, with his short-lin'd plummet,
Fathom the vast abyss of heav'nly justice.
Whatever is, is in its causes just ;

Since all things are by fate. But purblind man
Sees but a part o' th' chain; the nearest links;
His eyes not carrying to that equal beam
That poises all above.

290

Eur. Then we must die!

Tir. The danger's imminent this day.

Adr. "Why then there's one day less for human ills;

"And who would moan himself for suffering that

"Which in a day must pass? Something or nothing:

"I shall be what I was again, before

"I was Adrastus."

Penurious Heav'n! canst thou not add a night

To our one day? Give me a night with her.

300

And I'll give all the rest.

Tir. She broke her vow

First made to Creon. But the time calls on;

And Laius' death must now be made more plain.

How loth I am to have recourse to rites

So full of horror, that I once rejoice

I want the use of sight.

1st Pr. The ceremonies stay.

Tir. Choose the darkest part o' th' grove,

Such as ghosts at noon-day love.

310

Dig a trench, and dig it nigh

Where the bones of Laius lie,

Altars rais'd of turf or stone

Will th' infernal pow'rs have none.

Answer me if this be done?

All Pr. 'Tis done.

Tir. Is the sacrifice made fit?

Draw her backward to the pit;

Draw the barren heifer back;

Barren let her be, and black.

20

Cut the curled hair that grows
Full betwixt her horns and brows ;
And turn your faces from the sun,
Answer me if this be done ?

All Pr. 'Tis done.

Tir. Pour in blood, and blood like wine,
To mother Earth and Proserpine ;
Mingle milk into the stream ;
Feast the ghosts that love the steam ;
Snatch a brand from funeral pile,
Toss it in, to make them boil ;
And turn your faces from the sun.
Answer me if all be done ?

330

All Pr. All is done.

[Peals of thunder, and flashes of lightning ; then groaning below the stage.]

Man. Oh, what laments are those ?

Tir. the groans of ghosts that cleave the earth with pain,
And heave it up ; they pant and stick half way.

[The stage wholly darkened.]

Man. And now a sudden darkness covers all ;
True, genuine night ; night added to the groves ;
The fogs are blown full in the face of Heav'n.

340

Tir. Am I but half obey'd ? Infernal gods,
Must you have music too ? Then tune your voices,
And let them have such sounds as hell ne'er heard
Since Orpheus brib'd the shades.

" Music first, then sing.

" 1. Hear, ye sullen pow'rs below ;

" Hear, ye taskers of the dead :

" 2. You that boiling cauldrons blow,

" You that scum the molten lead.

- “ 3. You that pinch with red-hot tongs :
- “ 1. You that drive the trembling hosts 350
 “ Of poor, poor ghosts,
 “ With your sharpen’d prongs.
- “ 2. You that thrust them off the brim,
- “ 3. You that plunge them when they swim,
- “ 1. Till they drown,
 “ Till they go,
 “ On a row,
 “ Down, down, down,
 “ Ten thousand, thousand, thousand fathoms low.
- “ *Chorus.* Till they drown, &c. 360
- “ 1. Music for a while
 “ Shall your cares beguile,
 “ Wondring how your pains were eas’d ;
- “ 2. And disdaining to be pleas’d,
- “ 3. Till *Alecto* free the dead
 “ From their eternal bands ;
- “ Till the snakes drop from her head,
 “ And whip from out her hands.
- “ 1. Come away,
 “ Do not stay, 370
 “ But obey,
 “ While we play,
 “ For hell’s broke up, and ghosts have holiday.
- “ *Chorus.* Come away, &c.
- “ [*A flash of lightning : the stage is made bright, and the*
 “ *ghosts are seen passing betwixt the trees.*
- “ 1. *Laius!* 2. *Laius!* 3. *Laius!*
- “ 1. Hear! 2. Hear! 3. Hear!
- “ *Tir.* Hear and appear.
- “ By the Fates that spun thy thread,
- “ *Cho.* Which are three.

“ *Tir.* By the Furies fierce and dread,

380

“ *Cho.* Which are three.

“ *Tir.* By the Judges of the dead,

“ *Cho.* Which are three.

“ Three times three.

“ *Tir.* By Hell’s blue flame ;

“ By the Stygian lake ;

“ And by Demogorgon’s name,

“ At which ghosts quake,

“ Hear and appear !”

[*The Ghost of Laius rises, armed in his Chariot, as he was slain; and behind his Chariot sit the three who were murdered with him.*]

Ghost of Laius. Why hast thou drawn me from my pains below,

To suffer worse above ; to see the day,

391

And Thebes more hated ? Hell is heav’n to Thebes.

For pity send me back, where I may hide,

In willing night, this ignominious head.

In hell I shun the public scorn ; and then

They hunt me for their sport, and hoot me as I fly :

Behold, ev’n now, they grin at my gor’d side,

And chatter at my wounds.

Tir. I pity thee.

Tell but why Thebes is for thy death accurs’d,

400

And I’ll unbind the charm.

Ghost. Oh, spare my shame !

Tir. Are these two innocent ?

Ghost. Of my death they are.

But he who holds my crown, oh, must I speak !

Was doom’d to do what nature most abhors.

The gods foresaw it, and forbade his being

Before he yet was born. I broke their laws,

And cloth’d with flesh his pre-existing soul.

Some kinder pow'r too weak for destiny,
Took pity, and endu'd his new-form'd mass
With temperance, justice, prudence, fortitude,
And every kingly virtue. But in vain ;
For Fate, that sent him hoodwink'd to the world,
Perform'd its work by his mistaken hands.
Ask'st thou who murder'd me ? 'Twas Œdipus.
Who stains my bed with incest ? Œdipus,
For whom then are you curs'd, but Œdipus ?
He comes ! the parricide ! I cannot bear him !
My wounds ake at him ! Oh, his murd'rous breath
Venoms my airy substance ! Hence with him,
Banish him, sweep him out ; the plagues he bears
Will blast your fields, and mark his way with ruin.
From Thebes, my throne, my bed, let him be driven ;
Do you forbid him earth, and I'll forbid him Heav'n.

410

420

[*Ghost descends.*]

Enter OEDIPUS, CREON, HÆMON, &c.

OEdip. What's this ? Methought some pestilential blast
Struck me just entering ; and some unseen hand
Struggled to push me backward. Tell me why
My hair stands bristling up, why my flesh trembles ?
You stare at me ! Then hell has been among ye,
And some lag fiend yet lingers in the grove.

430

Tir. What omen saw'st thou, ent'ring ?

OEdip. A young stork,
That bore his aged parent on his back,
Till, weary with the weight, he shook him off,
And peck'd out both his eyes.

Adr. Oh, Œdipus !

Eur. Oh, wretched Œdipus !

Tir. Oh, fatal king !

OEdip. What mean these exclamations on my name? 440
I thank the gods, no secret thoughts reproach me.

“ No, I dare challenge Heav’n to turn me outward,

“ And shake my soul quite empty in your sight.”

Then wonder not that I can bear unmov’d

These fix’d regards, and silent threats of eyes.

A generous fierceness dwells with innocence ;

And conscious virtue is allow’d some pride.

Tir. Thou know’st not what thou say’st.

OEdip. What mutters he? Tell me, Eurydice——

Thou shak’st—thy soul’s a woman. Speak, Adrastus, 450

And boldly, as thou met’st my arm in fight.

Dar’st thou not speak? Why, then ’tis bad indeed.

Tiresias, thee I summon by thy priesthood ;

Tell me what news from Hell ; where Laius points,

And who’s the guilty head?

Tir. Let me not answer.

OEdip. Be dumb, then, and betray thy native soil
To farther plagues.

Tir. I dare not name him to thee.

OEdip. Dar’st thou converse with hell, and canst thou fear
An human name? 461

Tir. Urge me no more to tell a thing, which, known,
Would make thee more unhappy. ’Twill be found,
Tho’ I am silent.

OEdip. Old and obstinate! Then thou thyself
Art author or accomplice of this murder ;
And shunn’st the justice, which, by public ban,
Thou hast incurr’d.

Tir. Oh, if the guilt were mine,
It were not half so great! Know, wretched man, 470
Thou, only thou art guilty ; thy own curse
Falls heavy on thyself.

OEdip. Speak this again :

But speak it to the winds when they are loudest,
Or to the raging seas ; they'll hear as soon,
And sooner will believe.

Tir. Then hear me, Heav'n,

For, blushing, thou hast seen it : hear me, earth,
Whose hollow womb could not contain this murder,
But sent it back to light : and thou, hell, hear me,
Whose own black seal has 'firm'd this horrid truth :
Ædipus murdered Laius.

480

OEdip. Rot the tongue,

And blasted be the mouth that spoke that lye,
Thou blind of sight, but thou more blind of soul—

Tir. Thy parents thought not so.

OEdip. Who were my parents ?

Tir. Thou shalt know too soon.

OEdip. Why seek I truth from thee ?

The smiles of courtiers, and the harlot's tears,
The tradesman's oaths, and mourning of an heir,
Are truths to what priests tell.

490

Oh, why has priesthood privilege to lye,
And yet to be believ'd !—Thy age protects thee—

Tir. Thou canst not kill me ; 'tis not in thy fate,
As 'twas to kill thy father, wed thy mother,
And beget sons, thy brothers.

OEdip. Riddles, riddles !

Tir. Thou art thyself a riddle, a perplex'd,
Obscure ænigma, which, when thou unty'st,
Thou shalt be found and lost.

500

OEdip. Impossible !

Adrastus, speak ; and, as thou art a king,
Whose royal word is sacred, clear my fame.

Adr. Would I could !

OEdip. Ha ! wilt thou not ? Can that plebeian vice
Of lying mount to kings ? Can they be tainted ?
Then truth is lost on earth.

Cre. The cheat's too gross.
Adrastus is his oracle, and he, 510
The pious juggler, but Adrastus' organ.

OEdip. 'Tis plain ; the priest's suborn'd to free the pris'ner.

Cre. And turn the guilt on you.

OEdip. Oh, honest Creon, how hast thou been bely'd !

Eur. Hear me.

Cre. She's brib'd to save her lover's life.

Alc. If, Œdipus, thou think'st——

Cre. Hear him not speak.

Adr. Then hear these holy men.

Cre. Priests, priests, all brib'd, all priests ! 520

OEdip. Adrastus, I have found thee :
The malice of a vanquish'd man has seiz'd thee.

Adr. If envy, and not truth——

OEdip. I'll hear no more : away with him.

[*Hæmon takes him off by force ; Creon and Eur. follow.*]

[*To Tir.*] Why stand'st thou here, impostor ?

So old and yet so wicked !——Lye for gain,

And gain so short as age can promise thee !

Tir. So short a time as I have yet to live
Exceeds thy pointed hour. Remember Laius——

No more——If e'er we meet again, 'twill be 530

In mutual darkness we shall feel before us,

To reach each other's hand——Remember Laius.

[*Exit Tiresias ; Priests follow.*]

OEdip. Remember Laius ! that's the burden still,

Murder and incest ! But to hear them nam'd

My soul starts in me : “ the good centinel

“ Stands to his weapons, takes the first alarm,

"To guard me from such crimes." Did I kill Laius?
 Then I walk'd sleeping, in some frightful dream;
 My soul then stole my body out by night,
 And brought me back to bed ere morning-wake. 540
 It cannot be, ev'n this remotest way;
 But some dark hint would juggle forward now,
 And goad my memory—Oh, my Jocasta!

Enter JOCASTA.

Joc. Why are you thus disturb'd?

OEdip. Why, wouldst thou think it?

No less than murder.

Joc. Murder! what of murder?

OEdip. Is murder then no more? Add parricide
 And incest—bear not these a frightful sound?

Joc. Alas!

550

OEdip. How poor a pity is alas,
 For two such crimes!—Was Laius us'd to lye?

Joc. Oh, no! the most sincere, plain, honest man!
 One who abhorr'd a lye.

OEdip. Then he has got that quality in hell.
 He charges me—but why accuse I him?
 I did not hear him speak it. They accuse me,
 The priest, Adrastus, and Eurydice,
 Of murdering Laius—Tell me, while I think on't,
 Has old Tiresias practis'd long this trade? 560

Joc. What trade?

OEdip. Why, this foretelling trade.

Joc. For many years.

OEdip. Has he before this day accus'd me?

Joc. Never.

OEdip. Have you, ere this, enquir'd who did this murder?

Joc. Often; but still in vain.

OEdip. I'm satisfy'd.

Then 'tis an infant-lye ; but one day old.
The oracle takes place before the priest ;
The blood of Laius was to murder Laius :
I'm not of Laius' blood.

570

Joc. Ev'n oracles

Are always doubtful, and are often forg'd :
Laius had one, which never was fulfill'd.
Nor ever can be now.

OEdip. And what foretold it ?

Joc. That he should have a son by me, fore-doom'd
The murderer of his father. True, indeed,
A son was born ; but, to prevent that crime,
The wretched infant of a guilty fate,
Bor'd thro' his untry'd feet, and bound with cords,
On a bleak mountain naked was expos'd,
The king himself liv'd many, many years,
And found a different fate ; by robbers murder'd,
Where three ways meet. Yet these are oracles ;
And this the faith we owe them.

580

OEdip. Say'st thou, woman ?

By Heav'n, thou hast awaken'd somewhat in me
That shakes my very soul !

590

Joc. What new disturbance——

OEdip. Methought thou said'st, or do I dream thou said'st it?
This murder was on Laius' person done
Where three ways meet.

Joc. So common fame reports.

OEdip. Would it had ly'd !

Joc. Why, good my lord ?

OEdip. No questions.

'Tis busy time with me ; dispatch mine first,
Say, where, where was it done ?

600

Joc. Mean you the murder !

OEdip. Couldst thou not answer without naming murder?

Joc. They say in Phocide; on the verge that parts it
From Dalia, and from Delphos.

OEdip. So—How long? When happen'd this?

Joc. Some little time before you came to Thebes.

OEdip. What will the gods do with me?

Joc. What means that thought?

OEdip. Something—But 'tis not yet your turn to ask.

How old was Laius, what his shape, his stature, 610
His action, and his mien? Quick, quick, your answer.

Joc. Big made he was, and tall; his port was fierce,
Erect his countenance; manly majesty
Sat in his front, and darted from his eyes,
Commanding all he viewed; his hair just grisled,
As in a green old age. Bate but his years,
You are his picture.

OEdip. [*Aside.*] Pray Heav'n he drew me not!—Am I
his picture?

Joc. So I have often told you.

OEdip. True, you have: 620

Add that unto the rest. How was the king
Attended when he travell'd?

Joc. By four servants.
He went out privately.

OEdip. Well counted still!

One 'scap'd, I hear. What since became of him?

Joc. When he beheld you first, as king in Thebes,
He kneel'd, and, trembling, begg'd I would dismiss him.
He had my leave; and now he lives retir'd.

OEdip. This man must be produc'd; he must, Jocasta. 630

Joc. He shall—Yet have I leave to ask you why?

OEdip. Yes, you shall know; for where should I repose
The anguish of my soul, but in your breast?

I need not tell you Corinth claims my birth ;
My parents, Polybus and Merope,
Two royal names ; their only child am I.
It happen'd once, 'twas at a bridal feast,
One, warm with wine, told me I was a foundling,
Not the king's son : I, stung with this reproach,
Struck him ; my father heard of it ; the man
Was made ask pardon, and the business hush'd.

640

Joc. 'Twas somewhat odd.

OEdip. And strangely it perplex'd me.
I stole away to Delphos, and implor'd
The god to tell my certain parentage.
He bade me seek no farther ; 'twas my fate
To kill my father, and pollute his bed,
By marrying her who bore me.

Joc. Vain, vain oracles !

OEdip. But yet they frighted me.
I look'd on Corinth as a place accurs'd ;
Resolv'd my destiny should wait in vain,
And never catch me there.

650

Joc. Too nice a fear.

OEdip. Suspend your thoughts, and flatter not too soon.
Just in the place you nam'd, where three ways meet,
And near that time, five persons I encounter'd ;
One was too like (Heav'n grant it prove not him!)
The person you describe for Laius : insolent
And fierce they were, as men who liv'd on spoil ;
I judg'd them robbers, and by force repell'd
The force they us'd. In short, four men I slew ;
The fifth, upon his knees, demanding life,
My mercy gave it—Bring me comfort now.
If I slew Laius, what can be more wretched ?
From Thebes and you my curse has banish'd me ;
From Corinth, fate.

660

Joc. Perplex not thus your mind.
 My husband fell by multitudes oppress'd ;
 So Phorbus said. This band you chanc'd to meet ; 670
 And murder'd not my Laius, but reveng'd him,
OEdip. There's all my hope : let Phorbas tell me this,
 And I shall live again.
 To you, good gods, I make my last appeal ;
 Or clear my virtue, or my crime reveal.
 If wandering in the maze of fate I run,
 And backward trod the paths I sought to shun,
 Impute my errors to your own decree :
 My hands are guilty, but my heart is free. [Exeunt.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

Enter PYRACMON and CREON,

Pyracmon.

SOME business of import, that triumph wears,
 You seem to go with ; nor is it hard to guess
 When you are pleas'd, " by a malicious joy,
 " Whose red and fiery beams cast through your visage
 " A glowing pleasure. Sure" you smile revenge,
 And I could gladly hear.

Cre. Wouldst thou believe,
 This giddy, hair-brain'd king, whom old Tiresias
 Has thunder-struck with heavy accusation,
 Tho' conscious of no inward guilt, yet fears ?
 He fears Jocasta, fears himself, his shadow ;
 He fears the multitude ; and, which is worth
 An age of laughter, out of all mankind,
 He chooses me to be his orator :
 Swears that Adrastus and the lean-look'd prophet
 Are joint conspirators ; and wish'd me to

Appease the raving Thebans ; which I swore
To do.

Pyr. A dangerous undertaking ;
Directly opposite to our own interest.

20

Cre. No, dull Pyracmon ; when I left his presence
With all the wings with which revenge could imp
My flight, I gain'd the midst o' the city ;
There, standing on a pile of dead and dying,
I to the mad and sickly multitude,
With interrupting sobs, cry'd out, Oh, Thebes !
Oh, wretched Thebes ; thy king, thy Œdipus,
This barbarous stranger, this usurper, monster,
Is by the oracle, the wise Tiresias,
Proclaim'd the murderer of thy royal Laius !
Jocasta, too, no longer now my sister,
Is found complotter in the horrid deed.
Here I renounce all tie of blood and nature,
For thee, oh, Thebes, dear Thebes, poor bleeding Thebes !
And there I wept ; and then the rabble howl'd,
And roar'd, and with a thousand antic mouths,
Gabbled revenge ; revenge was all the cry.

30

Pyr. This cannot fail ; I see you on the throne,
And Œdipus cast out.

Cre. Then straight came on
Alcander, with a wide and bellowing crowd,
Whom he had wrought ; I whisper'd him to join,
And head the forces while the heat was in them.
So, to the palace I return'd, to meet
The king, and greet him with another story.
But see, he enters.————

40

Enter ŒDIPUS and JOCASTA, attended.

OEdip. Said you that Phorbas is arriv'd, and yet
Entreats he may return, without being ask'd

Of aught concerning what we have discover'd ?

Joc. He started when I told him your intent ;

50

Replying, what he knew of that affair

Would give no satisfaction to the king ;

Then, falling on his knees, begg'd as for life,

To be dismiss'd from court : he trembled too,

As if convulsive death had seiz'd upon him,

And stammer'd in his abrupt pray'r so wildly,

That had he been the murderer of Laius,

Guilt and distraction could not have shook him more.

OEdip. By your description, sure as plagues and death

Lay waste our Thebes, some deed that shuns the light

60

Begot those fears ; if thou respect'st my peace,

Secure him, dear Jocasta ; for my genius

Shrinks at his name.

Joc. Rather let him go ;

So my poor boding heart would have it be,

Without a reason.

OEdip. Hark, the Thebans come !

Therefore retire : and once more, if thou lov'st me,

Let Phorbas be retain'd.

Joc. You shall, while I

70

Have life, be still obey'd :

In vain you sooth me with your soft endearments,

And set the fairest countenance to view ;

Your gloomy eyes, my lord, betray a deadness

And inward languishing : that oracle

Eats like a subtle worm its venom'd way,

Preys on your heart, and rots the noble core,

Howe'er the beauteous outside shews so lovely.

OEdip. Oh, thou wilt kill me with thy love's excess !

All, all is well ; retire, the Thebans come.

[Exit *Joc.*

Ghost. *OEdipus* !

81

OEdip. Ha ! again that scream of woe !
 Thrice have I heard, thrice since the morning dawn'd
 It hallow'd loud, as if my guardian spirit
 Call'd from some vaulted mansion, *Œdipus* !
 Or is it but the work of melancholy ?
 When the sun set, shadows, that shew'd at noon
 But small, appear most long and terrible ;
 So when we think fate hovers o'er our heads,
 Our apprehensions shoot beyond all bounds,
 Owls, ravens, crickets, seem the watch of death,
 Nature's worst vermin scare her god-like sons ;
 Echoes, the very leavings of a voice,
 Grow babbling ghosts, and call us to our graves :
 Each mole-hill thought swells to a huge Olympus,
 While we fantastic dreamers heave and puff,
 And sweat with an imagination's weight ;
 As if, like Atlas, with these mortal shoulders
 We could sustain the burthen of the world.

90

[*Creon comes forward.*

Cre. Oh, sacred sir, my royal lord—

100

OEdip. What now ?

Thou seem'st affrighted at some dreadful action,
 Thy breath comes short, thy darted eyes are fix'd
 On me for aid, as if thou wert pursu'd.
 I sent thee to the Thebans : speak thy wonder ;
 Fear not, this palace is a sanctuary,
 The king himself's thy guard.

Cre. For me, alas !

My life's not worth a thought, when weigh'd with yours !
 But fly, my lord : fly, as your life is sacred.
 Your fate is precious to your faithful Creon,
 Who therefore, on his knees, thus prostrate, begs
 You would remove from Thebes, that vows your ruin:

110

When I but offer'd at your innocence,
They gather'd stones, and menac'd me with death,
And drove me through the streets, with imprecations
Against your sacred person, and those traitors
Which justify'd your guilt : which curs'd Tiresias
Told, as from Heav'n, was cause of their destruction.

OEdip. Rise, worthy Creon, haste and take our guard

Rank them in equal part upon the square, 121

Then open every gate of this our palace,

And let the torrent in. Hark, it comes. [*Shout.*

I hear them roar : begone, and break down all

The dams that would oppose their furious passage.

[*Exeunt Creon with Guards.*

Enter ADRASTUS, his Sword drawn.

Adr. Your city

Is all in arms, all bent to your destruction.

I heard but now, where I was close confin'd,

A thund'ring shout, which made my gaolers vanish,

Cry, Fire the palace ; where's the cruel king ? 130

Yet, by th' infernal gods, those awful pow'rs

That have accus'd you, which these ears have heard,

And these eyes seen, I must believe you guiltless ;

For, since I knew the royal *Ædipus*,

I have observ'd in all his acts such truth,

And god-like clearness ; that to the last gush

Of blood and spirits I'll defend his life,

And here have sworn to perish by his side.

OEdip. Be witness, gods, how near this touches me.

[*Embracing him.*

Oh, what, what recompence can glory make ? 140

Adr. Defend your innocence, speak like yourself,

And awe the rebels with your dauntless virtue.

ut hark ! the storm comes nearer.

OEdip. Let it come.

The force of majesty is never known
But in a general wreck : then, then is seen
The difference 'twixt a threshold and a throne.

*Enter CREON, PYRACMON, ALCANDER, TIRESIAS, and
Thebans.*

Alc. Where, where's this cruel king ? Thebans, behold
There stands your plague, the ruin, desolation
Of this unhappy——Speak ; shall I kill him ? 150
Or shall he be cast out to banishment ?

All Theb. To banishment ! away with him.

OEdip. Hence, you barbarians, to your slavish distance !
Fix to the earth your sordid looks ; for he
Who stirs, dares more than madmen, fiends, or furies.
“ Who dares to face me, by the gods, as well
“ May brave the majesty of thundering Jove.”
Did I for this relieve you, when besieg'd
By this fierce prince, when coop'd within your walls,
And to the very brink of fate reduc'd ? 160
When lean-jaw'd famine made more havoc of you
Than does the plague ? But I rejoice I know you,
Know the base stuff that temper'd your vile souls.
The gods be prais'd, I needed not your empire,
Born to a greater, nobler, of my own ;
Nor shall the sceptre of the earth now win me
To rule such brutes, so barbarous a people.

Adr. Methinks, my lord, I see a sad repentance,
A general consternation spread among them.

OEdip. My reign is at an end ; yet, ere I finish— 170
I'll do a justice that becomes a monarch,
A monarch who, i' th' midst of swords and javelins,
Dares act as on his throne encompass'd round

With nations for his guard. Alcander, you
Are nobly born, therefore shall lose your head : [*Seizes him.*
Here, Hæmon, take him ; but for this and this,
Let cords dispatch them. Hence, away with them.

[*Exit Hæmon, with Alcander, &c.*

Tir. Oh, sacred prince, pardon distracted Thebes,
Pardon her, if she acts by Heav'n's award ;
" If that th' infernal spirits have declar'd 180
" The depth of fate, and if our oracles
" May speak, oh, do not too severely deal,
" But let thy wretched Thebes at least complain : "
If thou art guilty, Heav'n will make it known :
If innocent, then let Tiresias die.

OEdip. I take thee at thy word : run, haste and save Alcander :

I swear the prophet or the king shall die.
Be witness, all you Thebans, of my oath ;
And Phorbas be the umpire.

Tir. I submit. [*Trumpets sound.*

OEdip. What mean those trumpets. 191

Enter HÆMON, with ALCANDER, &c.

Hæm. From your native country,
Great sir, the fam'd Ægeon is arriv'd,
That renown'd favourite of the king your father :
He comes as an ambassador from Corinth,
And sues for audience.

OEdip. Haste, Hæmon, fly, and tell him that I burn
T' embrace him,

Hæm. The queen, my lord, at present holds him
In private conference ; but behold her here. 200

Enter JOCASTA, EURYDICE, &c.

Joc. Hail, happy Œdipus, happiest of kings !
Henceforth be blest, blest as thou canst desire,
Sleep without fears the blackest nights away ;
Let furies haunt thy palace, thou shalt sleep
Secure, thy slumbers shall be soft and gentle
As infant dreams.

OEdip. What does the soul of all my joys intend ?
And whither would this rapture ?

Joc. Oh, I could rave,
Pull down those lying fanes, and burn that vault, 210
From whence resounded those false oracles,
That robb'd my love of rest : if we must pray,
Rear in the streets bright altars to the gods,
Let virgins' heads adorn the sacrifice ;
And not a grey-beard forging priest come near,
To pry into the bowels of the victim,
And with his dotage mad the gaping world.
But see, the oracle that I will trust,
True as the gods, and affable as men.

Enter ÆGEON. Kneels.

OEdip. Oh, to my arms, welcome, my dear Ægeon ;
Ten thousand welcomes, oh, my foster-father, 221
Welcome as mercy to a man condemn'd :
Welcome to me,
As, to a sinking mariner,
The lucky plank that bears him to the shore !
But speak ; oh, tell me what so mighty joy
Is this thou bring'st, which so transports Jocasta ?

Joc. Peace, peace, Ægeon, let Jocasta tell him !
Oh, that I could for ever charm, as now,

My dearest Œdipus ! thy royal father,
Polybus, king of Corinth, is no more.

230

OEdip. Ha ! Can it be ? Ægeon, answer me,
And speak in short what my Jocasta's transport
May over-do.

Æge. Since in few words, my royal lord, you ask
To know the truth ; king Polybus is dead.

OEdip. Oh, all you powers, is't possible ? What, dead ?
But that the tempest of my joy may rise
By just degrees, and hit at last the stars,
Say, how, how dy'd he ? Ha ! by sword, by fire,
Or water ? By assassinate, or poison ? Speak :
Or did he languish under some disease ?

240

Æge. Of no distemper, of no blast he died,
But fell like autumn fruit that mellow'd long :
Ev'n wonder'd at, because he dropp'd no sooner.
Fate seem'd to wind him up for fourscore years ;
Yet freshly ran he on ten winters more ;
Till, like a clock worn out with eating time,
The wheels of weary life at last stood still.

" *OEdip.* Oh, let me press thee in my youthful arms, 250
" And smother thy old age in my embraces.
" Yes, Thebans, yes, Jocasta, yes, Adrastus,
" Old Polybus, the king, my father's dead.
" Fires shall be kindled in the midst of Thebes ;
" I' th' midst of tumult, wars, and pestilence,
" I will rejoice for Polybus's death.
" Know, be it known to the limits of the world ;
" Yet farther, let it pass yon dazzling roof,
" The mansion of the gods, and strike them deaf
" With everlasting peals of thund'ring joy. 260

" *Tir.* Fate ! Nature ! Fortune ! what is all this world ?"

OEdip. Now, dotard ; now, thou blind old wizard prophet,

Where are your boding ghosts, your altars now ;
 Your birds of knowledge, that in dusky air
 Chatter futurity ? and where are now
 Your oracles, that call'd me parricide ?
 Is he not dead ? deep laid in his monument ?
 And was not I in Thebes when fate attack'd him ?
 Avaunt, begone, you visors of the gods !
 Were I as other sons, now I should weep ; 270
 But, as I am, I've reason to rejoice ;
 And will, though his cold shade should rise and blast me.
 Oh, for this death, let waters break their bounds,
 Rocks, valleys, hills, with splitting Io's ring ;
 Io, Jocasta, Io Pæan sing.

Tir. Who would not now conclude a happy end !
 But all Fate's turns are swift and unexpected.

Æge. Your royal mother, Merope, as if
 She had no soul since you forsook the land,
 Waves all the neighb'ring princes that adore her. 280

OEdip. Waves all the princes ! Poor heart ! For what ?
 Oh, speak.

Æge. She, tho' in full-blown flow'r of glorious beauty,
 Grows cold, ev'n in the summer of her age ;
 And, for your sake, has sworn to die unmarried.

OEdip. How ! for my sake, die, and not marry ! Oh,
 My fit returns.

Æge. This diamond, with a thousand kisses bless'd,
 With thousand sighs and wishes for your safety,
 She charg'd me give you, with the general homage
 Of our Corinthian lords. 290

OEdip. There's magic in it, take it from my sight ;
 There's not a beam it darts but carries hell,
 Hot flashing lust, and necromantic incest :
 Take it from these sick eyes ; oh, hide it from me.

No, my Jocasta, though Thebes cast me out,
While Merope's alive, I'll ne'er return !
Oh, rather let me walk round the wide world
A beggar, than accept a diadem
On such abhorr'd conditions.

Joc. You make, my lord, your own unhappiness, 300
By these extravagant and needless fears.

O Edip. Needless ! Oh, all you gods ! By Heav'n I'd rather
Embrue my hands up to my very shoulders
In the dear entrails of the best of fathers,
Than offer at the execrable act
Of damn'd incest : therefore no more of her.

Æge. And why, oh, sacred sir, if subjects may
Presume to look into their monarch's breast,
Why should the chaste and spotless Merope
Infuse such thoughts as I must blush to name ? 310

OEdip. Because the god of Delphos did forewarn me
With thundering oracles.

Æge. May I entreat to know them ?

OEdip. Yes, my Ægeon ; but the sad remembrance
Quite blasts my soul : see then the swelling priest !
Methinks I have his image now in view :
He mounts the Tripod in a minute's space,
His clouded head knocks at the temple-roof,
While from his mouth

These dismal words are heard : 320

" Fly, wretch, whom fate has doom'd thy father's blood to
spill,

" And with prepost'rous births thy mother's womb to fill."

Æge. Is this the cause
Why you refuse the diadem of Corinth ?

OEdip. The cause ! Why, is it not a monstrous one ?

Æge. Great sir, you may return : and tho' you should

Enjoy the queen (which all the gods forbid),
The act would prove no incest.

OEdip. How, Ægeon?

Though I enjoy'd my mother, not incestuous !

330

“ Thou rav'st, and so do I ; and these all catch

“ My madness ; look they're dead with deep distraction.”

Not incest ! What, not incest with my mother ?

Æge. My lord, queen Merope is not your mother.

OEdip. Ha ! did I hear thee right ? Not Merope
My mother !

Æge. Nor was Polybus your father.

OEdip. Then all my days and nights must now be spent
In curious search to find out those dark parents
Who gave me to the world ; speak then, Ægeon,
By all the gods celestial and infernal,
By all the ties of nature, blood, and friendship,
Conceal not from this rack'd despairing king
A point or smallest grain of what thou know'st :
Speak then, oh, answer to my doubts directly.
If royal Polybus was not my father,
Why was I call'd his son ?

340

Æge. He, from my arms,
Receiv'd you as the fairest gift of nature.
Not but you were adorn'd with all the riches
That empire could bestow in costly mantles
Upon its infant heir.

350

OEdip. But was I made the heir of Corinth's crown,
Because Ægeon's hands presented me ?

Æge. By my advice,
Being past all hope of children,
He took, embrac'd, and own'd you for his son.

OEdip. Perhaps I then am yours ; instruct me, sir ;
If it be so, I'll kneel and weep before you,

With all th' obedience of a penitent child,

360

Imploring pardon.

Kill me, if you please,

I will not writhe my body at the wound :

But sink upon your feet with a last sigh,

And ask forgiveness with my dying hands.

Æge. Oh, rise, and call not to this aged cheek
The little blood which should keep warm my heart ;
You are not mine, nor ought I to be blest
With such a god-like offspring. Sir, I found you
Upon the mount Cithæron.

370

OEdip. Oh, speak, go on, the air grows sensible
Of the great things you utter, and is calm :
The hurry'd orbs, with storms so rack'd of late,
Seem to stand still, as if that Jove were talking.
Cithæron ! Speak, the valley of Cithæron !

Æge. Oft-times before I thither did resort,
Charm'd with the conversation of a man
Who led a rural life, and had command
O'er all the shepherds, who about those vales
Tended their numerous flocks : in this man's arms

380

I saw you smiling at a fatal dagger,
Whose point he often offer'd at your throat ;
But then you smil'd, and then he drew it back,
Then lifted it again, you smil'd again ;
'Till he at last in fury threw it from him,
And cry'd aloud, The gods forbid thy death.
Then I rush'd in, and, after some discourse,
To me he did bequeath your innocent life ;
And I the welcome care to Polybus.

OEdip. To whom belongs the master of the shepherds ?

Æge. His name I knew not, or I have forgot :
That he was of the family of Laius

391

I well remember.

OEdip. And is your friend alive? for if he be,
I'll buy his presence, though it cost my crown.

Æge. Your menial attendants best can tell
Whether he lives or not; and who has now
His place.

Joc. Winds, bear me to some barren island,
Where print of human feet was never seen,
O'er-grown with weeds of such a monstrous height,
Their baleful tops are wash'd with bellying clouds;
Beneath whose venomous shade I may have vent
For horrors that would blast the barbarous world.

400

OEdip. If there be any here that knows the person
Whom he describ'd, I charge him on his life
To speak; concealment shall be sudden death:
But he who brings him forth, shall have reward
Beyond ambition's lust.

Tir. His name is Phorbas;
Jocasta knows him well; but if I may
Advise, rest where you are, and seek no farther.

410

OEdip. Then all goes well, since Phorbas is secur'd
By my Jocasta. Haste, and bring him forth:
My love, my queen, give orders. Ha! what mean
These tears, and groans, and strugglings? Speak, my fair,
Why are thy troubles?

Joc. Yours; and yours are mine:
Let me conjure you take the prophet's counsel,
And let this Phorbas go.

420

OEdip. Not for the world.
By all the gods, I'll know my birth, though death
Attends the search: I have already past
The middle of the stream; and to return
Seems greater labour than to venture o'er.
Therefore produce him.

Joc. Once more, by the gods,

I beg my Œdipus, my lord, my life,
My love, my all, my only utmost hope,
I beg you, banish Phorbas : oh, the gods,
I kneel, that thou may grant this first request.
Deny me all things else ; but for my sake,
And as you prize your own eternal quiet,
Never let Phorbas come into your presence.

430

OEdip. You must be rais'd, and Phorbas shall appear,
Though his dread eyes were basilisks. Guards, haste,
Search the queen's lodgings : find, and force him hither.

[*Exeunt Guards.*

Joc. Oh, Œdipus, yet send,
And stop their entrance, ere it be too late :
Unless you wish to see Jocasta rent
With furies, slain out-right with mere distraction,
Keep from your eyes and mine the dreadful Phorbas.
Forbear this search, I'll think you more than mortal,
Will you yet hear me ?

440

OEdip. Tempests will be heard,
And waves will dash, though rocks their basis keep.—
But see, they enter. If thou truly lov'st me,
Either forbear this subject, or retire.

Enter HÆMON, Guards, with PHORBAS.

Joc. Prepare then, wretched prince, prepare to hear
A story, that shall turn thee into stone.
Could there be hewn a monstrous gap in nature,
A flaw made through the centre, by some god,
Through which the groans of ghosts may strike thy ears,
They will not wound thee as this story will.
Hark, Hark ! a hollow voice calls out aloud,
Jocasta ! Yes, I'll to the royal bed,
Where first the mysteries of our loves were acted,

450

And double-dye it with imperial crimson ;
 Tear off this curling hair,
 Be gorg'd with fire, stab every vital part,
 And when at last I'm slain, to crown the horror,
 My poor tormented ghost shall cleave the ground,
 To try if hell can yet more deeply wound.

460

[Exit.

OEdip. She's gone ; and, as she went, methought her eyes
 Grew larger, while a thousand frantic spirits
 Seething, like rising bubbles, on the brim,
 Peep'd from the wat'ry brink, and glow'd upon me.
 I'll seek no more ; but hush my genius up
 That throws me on my fate.—Impossible !
 Oh, wretched man, whose too, too busy thoughts
 Ride swifter than the galloping heav'ns round,
 With an eternal hurry of the soul ;
 Nay, there's a time when ev'n the rolling year
 Seems to stand still, dead calms are in the ocean,
 When not a breath disturbs the drowsy waves :
 But man, the very monster of the world,
 Is ne'er at rest, the soul for ever wakes.
 Come then, since Destiny thus drives us on,
 Let's know the bottom. Hæmon, you I sent :
 Where is that Phorbas ?

470

480

Hæm. Here, my royal lord.

OEdip. Speak first, Ægeon, say, is this the man ?

Æge. My lord, it is ; though time has plough'd that face
 With many furrows since I saw it first ;
 Yet I'm too well acquainted with the ground, quite to forget
 it.

OEdip. Peace ! stand back a while.
 Come hither, friend ; I hear thy name is Phorbas.
 Why dost thou turn thy face ? I charge thee answer
 To what I shall enquire : wert thou not once

The servant to king Laius here in Thebes ?

500

Phor. I was, great sir, his true and faithful servant,
Born and bred up in court, no foreign slave.

OEdip. What office hadst thou ? What was thy employment ?

Phor. He made me lord of all his rural pleasures ;
For much he lov'd them : oft I entertain'd
With sporting swains, o'er whom I had command.

OEdip. Where was thy residence ? To what part o' th'
country

Didst thou most frequently resort ?

Phor. To mount Cithæron, and the pleasant vallies
Which all about lie shadowing its large feet.

510

OEdip. Come forth, Ægeon. Ha ! why start'st thou,
Phorbas ?

Forward, I say, and face to face confront him.
Look wistly on him, through him, if thou canst,
And tell me on thy life, say, dost thou know him ?
Didst thou e'er see him ? ere converse with him
Near mount Cithæron ?

Phor. Who, my lord, this man ?

OEdip. This man, this old, this venerable man :
Speak, didst thou ever meet him there ?

Phor. Where, sacred sir ?

520

OEdip. Near mount Cithæron : answer to the purpose,
'Tis a king speaks ; and royal minutes are
Of much more worth than thousand vulgar years :
Didst thou e'er see this man near mount Cithæron ?

Phor. Most sure, my lord, I have seen lines like those
His visage bears ; but know not where nor when.

Æge. Is't possible you should forget your ancient friend ?
There are perhaps
Particulars, which may excite your dead remembrance.

Have you forgot I took an infant from you, 530
Doom'd to be murder'd in that gloomy vale ?
The swaddling-bands were purple, wrought with gold.
Have you forgot too how you wept, and begg'd
That I should breed him up, and ask no more ?

Phor. Whate'er I begg'd, thou, like a dotard, speak'st
More than is requisite. And what of this ?
Why is it mention'd now ? And why, oh, why
Dost thou betray the secrets of thy friend ?

Æge. Be not too rash. That infant grew at last
A king ; and here the happy monarch stands. 540

Phor. Ha ! whither wouldst thou ? Oh, what hast thou
utter'd !

For what thou hast said, death strike thee dumb for ever !

OEdip. Forbear to curse the innocent ; and be
Accurst thyself, thou shifting traitor, villain,
Damn'd hypocrite, equivocating slave.

Phor. Oh, heav'ns ! wherein, my lord, have I offended ?

OEdip. Why speak you not according to my charge ?
Bring forth the rack ! since mildness cannot win you,
Torments shall force.

Phor. Hold, hold, oh, dreadful sir ; 550
You will not rack an innocent old man.

OEdip. Speak then.

Phor. Alas, what would you have me say ?

OEdip. Did this old man take from your arms an infant ?

Phor. He did ; and, oh, I wish to all the gods,
Phorbas had perish'd in that very moment.

OEdip. Moment ! Thou shalt be hours, days, years, a-
dying.

Here, bind his hands ; he dallies with my fury :
But I shall find a way——

Phor. My lord, I said 560

I gave the infant to him.

OEdip. Was he thy own, or given thee by another?

Phor. He was not mine; but given me by another.

OEdip. Whence? and from whom? What city? Of what house?

Phor. Oh, royal sir, I bow me to the ground,
Would I could sink beneath it: by the gods,
I do conjure you to enquire no more.

OEdip. Furies and hell! Hæmon, bring forth the rack,
Fetch hither cords, and knives, and sulph'rous flames:
He shall be bound, and gash'd, his skin flead off, 570
And burnt alive.

Phor. Oh, spare my age.

OEdip. Rise then, and speak.

Phor. Dread sir, I will.

OEdip. Who gave that infant to thee?

Phor. One of King Laius' family.

OEdip. Oh, you immortal gods! But say, who was't?
Which of the family of Laius gave it?
A servant, or one of the royal blood?

Phor. Oh, wretched state! I die, unless I speak; 580
And, if I speak, most certain death attends me!

OEdip. Thou shalt not die. Speak then, who was it!—
Speak.

While I have sense to understand the horror;
For I grow cold.

Phor. The queen Jocasta told me
It was her son by Laius.

OEdip. Oh, you gods!—But did she give it thee?

Phor. My lord, she did.

OEdip. Wherefore? For what?—Oh, break not yet my
heart;

Tho' my eyes burst, no matter. Wilt thou tell me, 590

Or, must I ask for ever : for what end,
Why gave she thee her child ?

Phor. To murder it.

OEdip. Oh, more than savage ! murder her own bowels !
Without a cause ?

Phor. There was a dreadful one,
Which had foretold, that most unhappy son
Should kill his father, and enjoy his mother.

OEdip. But one thing more.

Jocasta told me thou wert by the chariot 600
When the old king was slain. Speak, I conjure thee,
For I shall never ask thee aught again,
What was the number of th' assassines ?

Phor. The dreadful deed was acted but by one ;
And sure that one had much of your resemblance.

OEdip. 'Tis well ! I thank you, gods ! 'tis wondrous.
Daggers, and poisons ! Oh, there is no need
For my dispatch : and you, you merciless pow'rs,
Hoard up your thunder-stones ; keep, keep your bolts 609
For crimes of little note. [Falls.]

Adr. Help, Hæmon, help, and bow him gently forward ;
“ Chafe, chafe his temples : how the mighty spirits
“ Half-strangled with the damp his sorrows rais'd,
“ Struggle for vent ! But see, he breathes again,
“ And vigorous nature breaks through opposition.”
How fares my royal friend ?

OEdip. The worse for you.

Oh, barbarous men, and, oh, the hated light,
Why did you force me back to curse the day ;
To curse my friends ; to blast with this dark breath 620
The yet untainted earth and circling air ?
To raise new plagues, and call new vengeance down,
Why did you tempt the gods, and dare to touch me ?

“ Methinks there’s not a hand that grasps this hell,
 “ But should run up like flax all blazing fire.”
 Stand from this spot, I wish you as my friends,
 And come not near me, lest the gaping earth
 Swallow you too——Lo, I am gone already.

[Draws, and claps his sword to his breast, which Adrastus strikes away with his foot.]

Adr. You shall no more be trusted with your life :
 Creon, Alcander, Hæmon, help to hold him. 630

OEdip. Cruel Adrastus ! Wilt thou, Hæmon, too ?
 Are these the obligations of my friends ?
 Oh, worse than worst of my most barb’rous foes !
 Dear, dear Adrastus, look with half an eye
 On my unheard-of woes, and judge thyself,
 If it be fit that such a wretch should live !
 Or, by these melting eyes, unus’d to weep,
 With all the low submissions of a slave,
 I do conjure thee give my horrors way ;
 Talk not of life, for that will make me rave : 640
 As well thou may’st advise a tortur’d wretch,
 All mangled o’er from head to foot with wounds,
 And his bones broke, to wait a better day.

Adr. My lord, you ask me things impossible ;
 And I with justice should be thought your foe,
 To leave you in this tempest of your soul.

Tir. Tho’ banish’d Thebes, in Corinth you may reign ;
 Th’ infernal pow’rs themselves exact no more :
 Calm then your rage, and once more seek the gods. 649

OEdip. I’ll have no more to do with gods, nor men !
 “ Hence, from my arms avaunt ! Enjoy thy mother !
 “ What violate, with bestial appetite,
 “ The sacred veils that wrapt thee yet unborn !
 “ This is not to be borne ! Hence : off, I say ;

“ For they who let my vengeance, make themselves
 “ Accomplices in my most horrid guilt.

“ *Adr.* Let it be so: we’ll fence Heav’n’s fury from you,
 “ And suffer all together: this, perhaps,
 “ When ruin comes, may help to break your fall.” 660

OEdip. Oh, that, as oft I have at Athens seen
 The stage arise, and the big clouds descend;
 So now, in very deed, I might behold
 The pond’rous earth, and all yon marble roof
 Meet, like the hand of Jove, and crush mankind!
 For all the elements, and all the pow’rs
 Celestial, nay, terrestrial, and infernal,
 Conspire the rack of out-cast *Œdipus*.
 Fall darkness then, and everlasting night
 Shadow the globe; may the sun never dawn,
 The silver moon be blotted from her orb;
 And for an universal rout of nature,
 Through all the inmost chambers of the sky,
 May there not be a glimpse, one starry spark,
 But gods meet gods, and jostle in the dark;
 That jars may rise, and wrath divine be hurl’d,
 Which may to atoms shake the solid world, 670

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V. SCENE I.

Enter CREON, ALCANDER, and PYRACMON.

Creon.

THEBES is at length my own; and all my wishes,
 Which sure were great as royalty e’er form’d,
 Fortune and my auspicious stars have crown’d.
 O diadem, thou centre of ambition,

Where all its different lines are reconcil'd,
As if thou wert the burning-glass of glory!

Pyr. Might I be counsellor, I would entreat you
To cool a little, sir;

Find out Eurydice;

And with the resolution of a man

10

Mark'd out for greatness, give the fatal choice
Of death or marriage.

Alc. Survey curs'd Œdipus,

As one, who, tho' unfortunate, belov'd,

Though innocent, and therefore much lamented

By all the Thebans: you must mark him dead:

Since nothing but his death, not banishment,

Can give assurance to your doubtful reign.

Cre. Well have you done, to snatch me from the storm

Of racking transport, where the little streams

20

Of love, revenge, and all the under passions,

As waters are by sucking whirlpools drawn,

Were quite devour'd in the vast gulph of empire;

Therefore, Pyracmon, as you boldly urg'd,

Eurydice shall die, or be my bride.

Alcander, summon to their master's aid

My menial servants, and all those whom change

Of state, and hope of the new monarch's favour,

Can wish to take our part. Away! What now?

[Exit Alcander.

Enter HÆMON.

When Hæmon weeps, "without the help of ghosts,"

30

I may foretell there is a fatal cause.

Hæm. Is't possible you should be ignorant

Of what has happen'd to the desp'rate king?

Cre. I know no more but that he was conducted

Into his closet, where I saw him fling
His trembling body on the royal bed.
All left him there, at his desire, alone :
But sure no ill, unless he dy'd with grief,
Could happen, for you bore his sword away.

Hæm. I did ; and having lock'd the door, I stood ; 40
And through a chink I found, not only heard,
But saw him, when he thought no eye beheld him :
At first, deep sighs heav'd from his woeful heart
Murmurs, and groans that shook the outward rooms.
And art thou still alive, O wretch ! he cry'd :
Then groan'd again, as if his sorrowful soul
Had crack'd the strings of life, and burst away.

Cre. I weep to hear ; how then should I have griev'd,
Had I beheld this wondrous heap of sorrow !
But to the fatal period. 50

Hæm. Thrice he struck,
With all his force, his hollow groaning breast,
And thus, with out cries, to himself complain'd :
But thou canst weep then, and thou think'st 'tis well.
These bubbles of the shallowest, emptiest sorrow,
Which children vent for toys, and women rain
For any trifle their fond hearts are set on ;
Yet these thou think'st are ample satisfaction
For bloodiest murder, and for burning lust :
No, parricide ; if thou must weep, weep blood ; 60
Weep eyes instead of tears : O, by the gods,
'Tis greatly thought, he cry'd, and fits my woes.
Which said, he smil'd revengefully, and leapt
Upon the floor ; thence gazing at the skies,
“ His eye-balls fiery red, and glowing vengeance ;
“ Gods, I accuse you not, tho' I no more
“ Will view your heav'n, 'till with more durable glasses,

"The mighty soul's immortal perspectives,
 "I find your dazzling beings :—" take, he cry'd,
 Take, eyes, your last, your fatal farewell view ;
 Then with a groan, that seem'd the call of death,
 With horrid force, lifting his impious hands,
 He snatch'd, he tore, from forth their bloody orbs,
 The balls of sight, and dash'd them on the ground.

70

Cre. A master-piece of horror, new and dreadful !

Hæm. I ran to succour him : but, oh, too late ;
 For he had pluck'd the remnant strings away.
 What then remains, but that I find Tiresias,
 Who, with his wisdom, may allay those furies
 That haunt his gloomy soul ?

[Exit.

Cre. Heav'n will reward

81

Thy care, most honest, faithful, foolish Hæmon !
 But see, Alcander enters, well attended.

Enter ALCANDER, attended.

I see thou hast been diligent.

Alc. Nothing these,

For number, to the crowds that soon will follow :
 Be resolute,

And call your utmost fury to revenge.

Cre. Ha ! thou hast given

Th' alarm to cruelty ; and never may
 These eyes be clos'd, till they behold Adrastus
 Stretch'd at the feet of false Eurydice.

90

But see, they're here ; retire awhile, and mark.

Enter ADRASTUS and EURYDICE, attended.

Adr. Alas, Eurydice, what fond rash man,
 What inconsiderate and ambitious fool,

That shall hereafter read the fate of Œdipus,
Will dare, with his frail hand, to grasp a sceptre ?

Eur. 'Tis true, a crown seems dreadful, and I wish
That you and I, more lowly plac'd, might pass
Our softer hours in humble cells away :
Not but I love you to that infinite height,
I could (O wondrous proof of fiercest love !)
Be greatly wretched in a court with you.

100

Adr. Take then this most lov'd innocence away :
Fly from tumultuous Thebes, from blood and murder ;
Fly from the author of all villanies,
Rapes, death, and treason ; from that fury Creon.
Vouchsafe that I, o'er-joy'd, may bear you hence,
And at your feet present the crown of Argos.

[*Creon and Attendants come up to him.*

Cre. I have o'erheard thy black design, Adrastus,
And therefore, as a traitor to this state,
Death ought to be thy lot : let it suffice
That Thebes surveys thee as a prince : abuse not
Her proffer'd mercy, but retire betimes,
Lest she repent, and hasten on thy doom.

110

Adr. Think not, most abject,
Most abhorr'd of men,
Adrastus will vouchsafe to answer thee.
Thebans, to you I justify my love :
I have address'd my pray'r to this fair princess ;
But, if I ever meant a violence,
Or thought to ravish, as that traitor did,
What humblest adorations could not win ;
Brand me, you gods, blot me with foul dishonour,
And let men curse me by the name of Creon !

120

Eur. Hear me, O Thebans, if you dread the wrath
Of her whom fate ordain'd to be your queen,

Hear me, and dare not, as you prize your lives,
To take the part of that rebellious traitor.

By the decree of royal Œdipus,

130

By Queen Jocasta's order, by what's more,

My own dear vows of everlasting love,

I here resign to prince Adrastus' arms

All that the world can make me mistress of.

Cre. O, perjur'd woman!

Draw all! and when I give the word fall on.

Traitor, resign the princess, or this moment

Expect, with all those most unfortunate wretches,

Upon this spot straight to be hewn in pieces.

Adr. No, villain, no;

140

With twice those odds of men,

I doubt not in this cause to vanquish thee.

Captain, remember to your care I give

My love; ten thousand thousand times more dear

Than life or liberty.

Cre. Fall on, Alcander.

Pyracmon, you and I must wheel about

For nobler game, the princess.

Adr. Ah, traitor, dost thou shun me?

Follow, follow,

150

My brave companions, see the cowards fly.

[*Exeunt fighting: Creon's party beaten off by Adrastus.*]

Enter ŒDIPUS.

OEdip. O, 'tis too little this, thy loss of sight,

What has it done? I shall be gaz'd at now

The more; be pointed at, there goes the monster!

Nor have I hid my horrors from myself;

For tho' corporeal light be lost for ever,

The bright reflecting soul, through glaring optics,

Presents in larger size her black ideas,
 Doubling the bloody prospect of my crimes :
 Holds fancy down, and makes her act again, 160
 With wife and mother. " Tortures, hell and furies !
 " Ha ! now the baleful offspring's brought to light !
 " In horrid form they rank themselves before me ;
 " What shall I call this medley of creation ?
 " Here's one, with all th' obedience of a son,
 " Borrowing Jocasta's look, kneels at my feet,
 " And calls me father ; there a sturdy boy,
 " Resembling Laius just as when I kill'd him,
 " Bears up, and with his cold hand grasping mine,
 " Cries out, how fares my brother Œdipus ? 170
 " What, sons and brothers ! Sisters and daughters too !
 " Fly all, begone, fly from my whirling brain ;"
 Hence, incest, murder ; hence, you ghastly figures !
 O gods ! gods, answer : is there any means ?
 Let me go mad, or die.

Enter JOCASTA.

Joc. Where, where is this most wretched of mankind,
 This stately image of imperial sorrow,
 " Whose story told, whose very name but mention'd,
 " Would cool the rage of fevers, and unlock
 " The hand of lust from the pale virgin's hair, 180
 " And throw the ravisher before her feet ?"
OEdip. By all my fears, I think Jocasta's voice !
 Hence ; fly ; begone ! " O thou far worse than worst
 " Of damning charmers ! O abhorr'd, loath'd creature !
 " Fly, by the gods, or by the fiends, I charge thee,"
 Far as the east, west, north, or south of Heav'n ;
 But think not thou shall ever enter there :
 The golden gates are barr'd with adamant,

'Gainst thee, and me ; and the celestial guards,
Still as we rise, will dash our spirits down.

190

" *Joc.* O wretched pair ! O greatly wretched we !

" Two worlds of woe !

" *OEdip.* Art thou not gone then ? ha !

" How dar'st thou stand the fury of the gods ?

" Or com'st thou in the grave to reap new pleasures ?

" *Joc.* Talk on ; till thou mak'st mad my rolling brain ;

" Groan still more death ; and may those dismal sources

" Still bubble on, and pour forth blood and tears.

" Methinks, at such a meeting, Heav'n stands still :

" The sea nor ebbs nor flows : this mole-hill earth

200

" Is heav'd no more : the busy emmets cease :

" Yet hear me on——

" *OEdip.* Speak then, and blast my soul.

" *Joc.* O, my lov'd lord ! tho' I resolve a ruin

" To match my crimes ; by all my miseries,

" 'Tis horror, worse than thousand thousand deaths,

" To send me hence without a kind farewell.

" *OEdip.* Gods, how she shakes me ! Stay thee, O Jocasta.

" Speak something ere thou goest for ever from me.

" *Joc.* 'Tis woman's weakness, that I should be pity'd ;

" Pardon me then, O greatest, tho' most wretched

211

" Of all thy kind : my soul is on the brink,

" And sees the boiling furnace just beneath :

" Do not thou push me off, and I will go,

" With such a willingness, as if that Heav'n

" With all its glory glow'd for my reception.

" *OEdip.* O, in my heart, I feel the pangs of nature ;

" It works with kindness o'er : give, give me way ;

" I feel a melting here, a tenderness,

" Too mighty for the anger of the gods !

220

" Direct me to thy knees : yet oh forbear,

" Lest the dead embers should revive.
 " Stand off—and at just distance
 " Let me groan my horrors—here
 " On the earth, here blow my utmost gale ;
 " Here sob my sorrows, till I burst with sighing ;
 " Here gasp and languish out my wounded soul."

Joc. In spite of all those crimes the cruel gods
 Can charge me with, I know my innocence ;
 Know yours : 'tis fate alone that makes us wretched, 230
 For you are still my husband.

OEdip. Swear I am,
 And I'll believe thee ; steal into thy arms,
 Renew endearments, think them no pollutions,
 But chaste as spirits' joys : gently I'll come,
 Thus weeping blind, like dewy night, upon thee,
 And fold thee softly in my arms to slumber.

[*The Ghost of Laius ascends by degrees, pointing at Jocasta.*

Joc. Begone, my lord ! Alas, what are we doing ?
 Fly from my arms ! Whirlwinds, seas, continents,
 And worlds, divide us ! Oh, thrice happy thou, 240
 Who hast no use of eyes : for here's a sight
 Would turn the melting face of Mercy's self
 To a wild fury.

OEdip. Ha ! what see'st thou there ?

Joc. The spirit of my husband ! Oh, the gods !
 How wan he looks !

OEdip. Thou rav'st ; thy husband's here.

Joc. There, there he mounts
 In circling fire among the blushing clouds !
 And see, he waves Jocasta from the world ! 250

Ghost. Jocasta, Œdipus. [*Vanish with thunder.*

OEdip. What wouldst thou have ?
 Thou know'st I cannot come to thee, detain'd



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Swift as a falling meteor ; lo, I fly,
And thus go downwards to the darker sky.

*[Thunder. He flings himself from the window. The
Thebans gather about his body.]*

Hæm. Oh, prophet : Ædipus is now no more !
Oh, curs'd effect of the most deep despair !

Tir. Cease your complaints, and bear his body hence ;
The dreadful sight will daunt the drooping Thebans, 500
Whom Heav'n decrees to raise with peace and glory.

Yet, by these terrible examples warn'd,
The sacred fury thus alarms the world.

Let none, though ne'er so virtuous, great, and high,

Be judg'd entirely bless'd before they die. *[Exeunt omnes.]*

EPILOGUE.

WHAT Sophocles could undertake alone,
Our poets found a work for more than one ;
And therefore two lay tugging at the piece,
With all their force to draw the pond'rous mass from Greece.
A weight that bent ev'n Seneca's strong muse,
And which Corneille's shoulders did refuse.
So hard it is th' Athenian harp to string ;
So much two consuls yield to one just king.
Terror and pity this whole poem sway ;
The mightiest machines that can mount a play.
How heavy will those vulgar souls be found,
Whom two such engines cannot move from ground !
When Greece and Rome have smil'd upon this birth,
You can but damn for one poor spot of earth ;
And when your children find your judgment such,
They'll scorn their sires, and wish themselves born Dutch :
Each haughty poet will infer with ease,
How much his wit must underwrite to please.
As some strange churl would brandishing advance
The monumental sword that conquer'd France ;
So you, by judging this, your judgment teach,
Thus far you like, that is, thus far you reach.
Since, then, the vote of full two thousand years
Has crown'd this plot, and all the dead are theirs,
Think it a debt you pay, not alms you give,
And, in your own defence, let this play live.
Think them not vain, when Sophocles is shown ;
To praise his worth, they humbly doubt their own :

*Yet, as weak states each other's pow'r assure,
Weak poets by conjunction are secure :
Their treat is what your palates relish most,
Charm, song, a shew, a murder, and a ghost !
We know not what you can desire or hope,
To please you more, but burning of a Pope.*



7 JU 52

